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From Belfast to Basra: Britain and the ‘Tri-partite Counter-Insurgency Model’

by

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Declaration

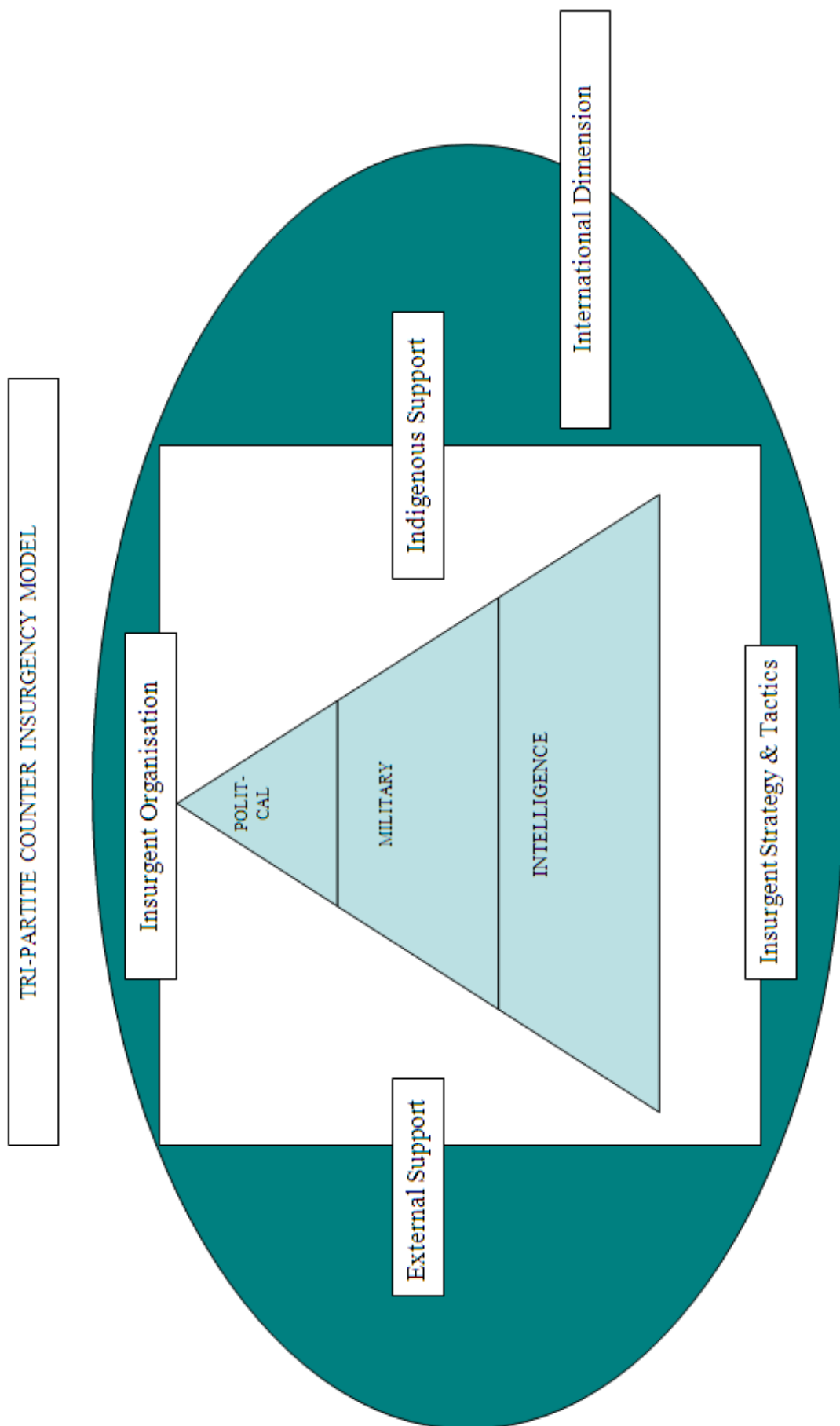
I declare that this thesis contains no material previously used or published. It is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution.

Abstract

Counter-insurgency assumed a status during the twentieth century as one of the British military's *fortes*. A wealth of asymmetric warfare experience was accumulated after World War Two, as the small wars of decolonisation offered the army of a fading imperial power the opportunity to regularly deploy against an irregular enemy. Yet this quantity of experience has been misguidedly conflated with quality. This thesis holds that the British, far from being the counter-insurgent exemplars that history has benevolently cast them, have in fact consistently proven to be slow learners and slow strategic burners in the realm of counter-insurgency warfare.

The case study-based nature of this thesis, utilising the chronologically and geographically dispersed examples of Malaya (1948-60), Kenya (1952-60), South Yemen (1962-67), the first decade of the Northern Irish 'Troubles' (1969-79), culminates with an analysis of the recent British counter-insurgency campaign in southern Iraq (2003-09).

This thesis will blend historical narrative with critical analysis in order to establish a new paradigm through which to interpret and analyse British inertia in counter-insurgency and help unpack the mythology of inherent British competence in the realm of irregular warfare. Three major dimensions emerge. These elements constitute a 'Tri-Partite Counter-Insurgency Model', and were carefully selected as comprising the major causal and impacting factors contributing to success or failure in counter-insurgency, and were settled upon after an exhaustive review of primary and secondary literature relating to counter-insurgency, both historical and doctrinal. The Tri-Partite Model is constructed by three interactive and interdependent factors: the counter-insurgent, the insurgent, and the international political context.



CHAPTER 1: *Britain, Counter-Insurgency and the Tri-Partite Model*

Counter-insurgency assumed a status during the twentieth century as one of the British military's *fortes*. A wealth of asymmetric warfare experience was accumulated after World War Two, as the small wars of decolonisation offered the army of a fading imperial power the opportunity to regularly deploy against an irregular enemy. Yet this quantity of experience has been misguidedly conflated with quality. This thesis holds that the British, far from being the counter-insurgent exemplars that history has benevolently cast them, have in fact consistently proven to be slow learners and slow strategic burners in the realm of counter-insurgency warfare.

The case study-based nature of this thesis, utilising the chronologically and geographically dispersed examples of Malaya (1948-60), Kenya (1952-60), South Yemen (1962-67), the first decade of the Northern Irish 'Troubles' (1969-79), culminates with an analysis of the recent British counter-insurgency campaign in southern Iraq (2003-09). The poor operational performance in and around Basra pulled the mask away from the hitherto rosy popular trans-Atlantic perception of British competence at counter-insurgency. Indeed, it went further by fulfilling a linear progression of British conduct in irregular warfare, arguably demonstrable from Malaya onwards, by failing to swiftly apply lessons learnt from previous campaigns, and by failing to achieve a level of strategic cogency until after the insurgency has had time to flourish.

This thesis will blend historical narrative with critical analysis in order to establish a new paradigm through which to interpret and analyse British inertia in counter-insurgency and help unpack the mythology of inherent British competence in the realm of irregular warfare. Three major dimensions emerge. These elements constitute a 'Tri-Partite Counter-Insurgency Model', and were carefully selected as comprising the major causal and impacting factors contributing to success or failure in counter-insurgency, and were settled upon after an exhaustive review of primary and secondary literature relating to counter-insurgency, both historical and doctrinal. These factors are essentially timeless and universal in insurgencies, therefore circumventing any temporal or regional restrictions on the analysis. The factors inherent in the model provide a comprehensive analysis of the doctrinal elements that underpin counter-insurgency and a practical assessment of the application of counter-insurgency strategy and tactics. I make no claims to have constructed a prescriptive model that tells us how to beat insurgents. Instead, it is offered as a pragmatic framework that allows us to make sense of the numerous factors impacting upon a state's conduct in counter-insurgency conflicts, and allows us to assert the factors that impinged upon British 'success' in the realm of irregular warfare. This model is intended to be creative, not imitative. In an era when insurgency and terrorism has come to define contemporary conflict it is hoped that this framework can shed some light on this often perplexing form of warfare. Indeed, the factors identified in the model reveal that history has a lot to teach us about how to combat the contemporary threat posed to Western states. There are perhaps more consistencies than innovations in the trends insurgent groups have shown and the way in which states combat them. Beware the neologists.

The Tri-Partite Model is constructed by three interactive and interdependent factors: the counter-insurgent, the insurgent, and the international political context. The rest of this chapter will lay out the premise of this model and explain how it presents a revelatory insight into the way we can interpret slow learning and slow burning by the British in the realm of counter-insurgency.

At the heart of the model is the first factor that analyses the strategy, tactics and operational art of the counter-insurgents, in this case the British. Literature on British counter-insurgency, both primary and secondary, has revealed, to my mind at least, that all British counter-insurgency operations ultimately rest on three inter-twined factors: military effectiveness, which is proved to be strategically slow if tactically innovative; active intelligence gathering, particularly by indigenous police forces; and close political management of both military operations and societal co-operation.

The British military has long prided itself on the ethos in counter-insurgency campaigns of ‘minimum force’, and this has, by-and-large, held true. On the frontline the British military have had to adapt to new conflict environments and change tactics, even strategy, accordingly. Military priorities, particularly in rural insurgencies, are initially focused on cutting insurgents off from their supply network before moving in to strangle the pockets of resistance with accurate and efficient engagements.

Yet military operations would have been totally ineffective, be it in the Malayan jungle, the Kenyan forest, or the Ulster housing estate, if it was not for accurate intelligence as to the location and intention of insurgents. The intelligence community, both British and indigenous, plays a crucial role in insurgencies and the information garnered is vital for the wider counter-insurgency effort. This requires cultivating a network of informers and agents, as well as establishing an effective system of interrogation for surrendered or captured enemy personnel. This has proved to be one of the most controversial and brutal elements of British counter-insurgency operations.

However, the military campaign can be severely undermined by bad political management. Counter-insurgency operations are inescapably political in their scope (indeed so are the insurgencies that provoke a reaction), therefore the objectives of a counter-insurgency strategy are politically motivated and require astute political leadership. The political authorities, both in Whitehall and within the host nation, are responsible for employing economic and social measures to wrest control of the insurgency and instigating legal controls that mutually ensure popular support for the government and dissuade sympathy and help for the insurgents. This thesis also contents that all colonial insurgencies must be viewed in the context of the retreat from Empire, whereby a politically stage-managed military withdrawal after the establishment of an acceptable post-colonial regime backed by an effective post-colonial security force became the ultimate end-game of British counter-insurgency strategy. From Malaya onwards, it became clear that close civil-military relations were essential to a successful counter-insurgency effort and that delegation to the

most local level was required in order to meet specific regional insurgent threats, albeit conducive to an eventually enunciated national strategy.

Yet too many counter-insurgency texts are what I would label ‘internally agent-centric’ in as much as they focus primarily inwards on the counter-insurgent nation (i.e. Britain) and that they place too much of an emphasis on the role of individuals (i.e. General Templer in Malaya). Therefore it is essential to analyse counter-insurgency campaigns within the context of factors relating to the insurgent group itself. This contextualisation is necessary in helping explain the short-comings of British counter-insurgency efforts by measuring their own strategic merits and deficiencies against those of their opponents. For this to be achieved, four factors must be analysed in regard to the insurgent group: their organisational structure, which dictates the level of cohesion and autonomy to undertake guerrilla activities, whether hierarchical or cell-based, as well as their level of preparedness; the guerrilla strategy and tactics that they adopt, from a Maoist rural revolt to urban terrorism, which will inevitably shape the counter-insurgency response required; the level of domestic support for their cause, which is commensurate with the level of political sympathy and logistical supplies from internal supporters; and the level of external support they are receiving from outside groups or a sponsor state in terms of solidarity or logistical help.

By including the wider international political picture into the analytical framework this thesis, in part, aims to transcend the traditional bi-polar schools of decolonisation theory. The ‘liberal commonwealth’ interpretation places the causes of

decolonisation at the door of British policy, blaming Whitehall intransigence and imperial arrogance for losing the Empire. Conversely, the 'nationalist' perspective contends that decolonisation came about as a result of grass roots anti-colonial protest, forcing a ground swell of opinion across the Empire to break the imperial chains.¹ However, what these two schools fail to account for is the role of external actors outside the metropole-periphery relationship in the process of decolonisation and the insurgencies it provoked. Not only did Britain have to contend with the exigencies of a crumbling Empire in the post-World War Two era, but concomitantly deal with a new order of world politics as America gained a primacy of power at the start of the nuclear age. Britain's economic dependency on the US during the phase of post-war reconstruction placed restrictions on the financial costs of maintaining the Empire. The post-war era brought about, in Frank Furedi's words, the 'termination of the Western consensus regarding colonialism', which fostered a 'new international environment (that) complicated the task of imperial control.'² As the temperature of Western-Soviet relations plummeted in the late 1940s it became increasingly difficult to separate the dual developments of anti-colonial insurgencies and Cold War proxy conflicts, especially given mutual policy decrees such as the Truman Doctrine or Nikita Khrushchev's 1961 declaration of Soviet support for 'wars of national liberation' in the Third World.³ The superpower age now rendered it increasingly impossible for a medium power like Britain to engage in a counter-insurgency campaign that involved defeating a communist enemy (as in Malaya), or

¹ For discussion see John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1988), pp.17-25.

² Frank Furedi, 'Creating a Breathing Space: The Political Management of Colonial Emergencies', in Robert Holland (ed), *Emergencies and Disorder in the European Empires After 1945* (London: Frank Cass, 1994) p.90.

³ For an analysis of Soviet policy on Third World conflicts see Roger E. Kanet, 'The Superpower Quest for Empire: The Cold War and Soviet Support for "Wars of National Liberation"', *Cold War History*, Vol.6 No.3 (2006), pp.331-52.

engaging in conflict with forces known to have superpower backing (as in Yemen) without causing an interplay between the perceived imperial right to maintain control in the colonies and the pervasive global ideological strive for dominance that overshadowed international relations for nearly half a century. Even supposed 'domestic' conflicts, such as the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland were unavoidably tinged with the effects of the wider geo-political scene, given both the large influence of the Irish diaspora in American politics in attempts to mediate in the conflict, as well as republican groups' efforts to secure Soviet arms in the spirit of solidarity in undermining the British occupier. As scholarly benchmarking supersedes the 'post-9/11 world' for the 'post-Cold War world', the emphasis on the international dimension of insurgencies is as relevant as it was fifty years ago. Although the causes and catalysts for insurgencies have changed, the global dimension to the way they are conducted has not. States clamoured to join President Bush's 'coalition of the willing', which has now effectively been turned into a huge counter-insurgent military force in response to the degeneration of the War on Terror into a protracted war of attrition with a disparate yet determined insurgent resistance movement. If the War on Terror is the defining conflict of the early twenty-first century, then counter-insurgency is the defining mode of waging war against the enemies of Western states. As these insurgents take their fight to domestic populations through acts of mass terrorism (New York, Washington, Madrid, London, Bali) the internationalisation of insurgency has embedded itself in not only analysis of asymmetric warfare but in our evaluation and understanding of contemporary international relations.

Insurgencies in History

One of the first aspects of insurgencies and the efforts to counter them we must qualify is that they are not new. We must place insurgencies within their temporal context, exposing neologist misconceptions of this form of warfare. Armed insurgency and guerrilla conflict is, in Walter Laqueur's phrase, 'as old as the hills,' and indeed predates what we would conceive of as conventional warfare.⁴ Whether labelled 'guerrilla', 'partisan' or 'insurgent', the irregularity of the warfare such combatants are involved in is far from modern. Despite being overshadowed by the rise of the standing army and the set-piece, increasingly destructive, wars that came to define war in the industrial age, irregular or asymmetric warfare has formed a perennial element of conflict on almost every continent. The Roman Empire was littered with pockets of native insurgencies against imperial rule, perhaps setting a precedent for another two millennia of insurgent *casus belli*. Even the great Imperial Army of Rome had difficulties adopting an effective strategy to eliminate small insurgent groups. Superpowers, both then and now, are still plagued by that very same problem.

Westphalian Europe witnessed a high degree of sub-state insurgent activity, notably in the Vendee region of France, in the Tyrol, and in Spain, where the term 'guerrilla' was first coined to describe the form of warfare waged against Napoleonic France between 1808 and 1813. It must also be remembered that the adoption of insurgent tactics played a role in both the French and American Revolutions of the late eighteenth century, whilst the Latin American wars of independence in the

⁴ Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977), p.vii.

nineteenth century utilised similar methods against colonial rulers.⁵ Of particular relevance to the emergence of British counter-insurgency strategy were the insurrections of the New Zealand Maoris, the southern African Kaffirs, the Burmese *dacoits*, and especially the Boers of South Africa in the mid to late-nineteenth century, where the British remained unable to contain the cavalry hit-and-run strikes of the Boer horsemen. The British experiences in the first three of these examples were to prompt the emergence of arguably the first theoretical analysis of counter-insurgency, C.E Callwell's 1896 work *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*⁶. This book offered the 'first real synthesis' of modern counter-insurgency⁷, and although steeped in imperial arrogance offers some enduring observations on the importance of intelligence and population 'reconcentration' (resettlement in modern terms). In the inter-war years, the British had amassed a significant amount experience at suppressing uprisings and rebellions through Empire-wide 'imperial policing'. Ensuring the internal security of colonies in the far-flung corners of the Empire did not render a particularly nuanced approach from the British, and this heavy-handed inclination was exposed during the Anglo-Irish war of 1919-21 when the wonton brutality of the Black and Tans in arguably Britain's first outright counter-insurgency campaign sent shockwaves through British society and had inevitable political consequences.⁸

⁵ Laqueur's book offers an excellent overview of the historical roots of guerrilla warfare and insurgent tactics. Chapter 1 is particularly useful.

⁶ C.E Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* (Lincoln, NB: Bison Books, 1996 [1896]).

⁷ Ian Beckett, 'The Study of Counter-Insurgency: A British Perspective', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 1 No.1 (April 1990), p.48.

⁸ Thomas Mockaitis, 'The Origins of British Counter-Insurgency', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.1 No.3 (December 1990), p.212.

Doctrinal attempts on behalf of the military to codify conduct in such conflicts came with the publication of the pamphlets *Notes on Imperial Policing* (1934) and *Duties in Aid of the Civil Power* (1937), which were tested during the Jewish insurgency in Palestine (1943-48) when groups such as Irgun and the Stern Gang initiated a terrorist campaign against the colonial rulers in favour of the creation of the Israeli state. Martial law and exclusively military solutions to the Jewish guerrillas proved ineffective in quelling the violence and further alienated the government from the wider Jewish population. Such critical miscalculations were to undergo a fundamental reappraisal in the post-World War Two era when irregular warfare, in the form of colonial insurgencies, proliferated across European colonies, provoking the emergence of a body of literature that laid the foundations of counter-insurgency doctrine that would last nearly half a century.

Counter-Insurgency Literature and Doctrinal Shifts

The literature on counter-insurgency, in both a doctrinal and empirical context, has been sporadic to say the least. Marginalised from mainstream security and strategic studies literature, counter-insurgency research has a longevity problem. This can largely be attributed to the emergent correlation between interest in counter-insurgency and the strategic priorities of the American military that has become manifest in the aftermath of Vietnam. The conventional warfare culture that pervaded American military thinking pre-Iraq sidelined any efforts to build a coherent and consistent body of knowledge on irregular warfare. Other militaries, notably the British, have more successfully cultivated a sizeable library from their

extensive counter-insurgency experiences throughout the latter half of the twentieth-century, with British and French so-called ‘warrior-scholars’ forming the backbone of the ‘classical’ counter-insurgency research in the 1960s. The imbibing of these lessons in later asymmetric combat zones is, however, a different matter altogether.

Counter-insurgency research has not produced a consistent body of literature since its ascendance as arguably the standard form of warfare in the post-World War Two era. Indeed, the pattern of emergent literature on the subject has been as irregular as the nature of the conflicts themselves. In the Cold War era, and the unipolar phase that has followed, the strategic priorities of the US came to dictate the military thinking of other Western states. Consequentially, counter-insurgency research has always fluctuated with American engagements and the demands of the American ‘way of war’. The first major wave of counter-insurgency literature was resultant from the need of the American military to learn irregular warfare in Vietnam, and this need for strategic direction produced some of the early ‘classics’ in the field, notably Robert Thompson’s *Defeating Communist Insurgency*⁹, John McCuen’s *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary Warfare*¹⁰, and David Galula’s *Counter-Insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*.¹¹ Pre-occupied with strategic planning for a large conventional war in Europe and for a nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union, the US essentially attempted to fight an irregular war with regular warfare tactics, arguably up until the removal of General William Westmoreland in 1968, by which time the insurgency had wrestled the military initiative away from the Americans and secured a foothold

⁹ Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (St Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2005 [1966]).

¹⁰ John J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary Warfare* (St Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2005 [1966]).

¹¹ David Galula, *Counter-Insurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006 [1964]).

in the population. However, instead of triggering a consistent level of counter-insurgency research that would inculcate an understanding of irregular warfare into American, and therefore wider Western, military culture, the end of American involvement in Vietnam witnessed a parallel curtailment of academic interest in counter-insurgency as attention returned to conventional, and largely hypothetical, strategies of a ground or nuclear war with the Soviets. The decade that followed American withdrawal from Vietnam became, in the words of one RAND Corporation report, a ‘fallow period’ for counter-insurgency research.¹² There was a momentary resurgence of interest as the Reagan administration concomitantly attempted to support and suppress numerous insurgencies in Latin America, however the abrupt end to the Cold War and the dawn of the unipolar era significantly reduced the military and political establishment’s eagerness to understand the peculiar machinations of low intensity conflict. If counter-insurgency had been eclipsed as a major research topic in the 1980s by the arms race, it became overshadowed in the 1990s by the ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’ (RMA) and so-called ‘New Wars’. Despite the military and economic investment in peace-keeping and nation-building, counter-insurgency was barely touched upon as an issue affecting such priorities, despite the significance of actors such as the guerrilla forces of Mohammed Farrah Aidid who caused the infamous ‘Black Hawk Down’ incident that provoked American withdrawal from Somalia, and the Kosovo Liberation Army who acted as a *de facto* NATO ally in undermining Serbian security forces with guerrilla strikes against army units. As if to further demonstrate that counter-insurgency research has always waxed and waned with American strategic engagements, we have witnessed an exponential rise in counter-insurgency literature, in terms of monographs, reports,

¹² Austin Long, *On ‘Other War’: Lessons from Five Decades of RAND Counterinsurgency Research* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2006), p.9.

and journal articles in the wake of the insurgency in Iraq after the 2003 invasion. The US Army has even been compelled to significantly update and revise its counter-insurgency field manual for the first time in twenty years.¹³ As David Kilcullen astutely observed in late 2006: ‘more has been written on it [counter-insurgency] in the last four years than in the last four decades.’¹⁴ The rapid transformation of the Iraq war from a well-executed demonstration of how to win a conventional land war to a quagmire of ill-conceived counter-insurgency operations that belies strategic planning has converted counter-insurgency research from a focus of historical analysis to a relevant contemporary subject that provides signposts for the way out of an increasingly intractable imbroglio. The Americans have also demonstrated, particularly in Iraq, a slow burning strategy that arguably attained impetus with the 2007 ‘surge’ of troops and the parallel strategic shift implemented by General David Petraeus.

‘Classic’ has been a label attached to the first body of counter-insurgency literature that emerged in the 1960s, borne primarily out of the experiences of a number of Western states in fighting insurgencies in South-East Asia: the British in Malaya, the French in Indo-China, and the American’s picking up where the French left off in Vietnam. The other most noteworthy contribution to the body of ‘classical’ work came in the early 1970s with Frank Kitson’s *Low Intensity Operations*, which emanated from his extensive low-intensity combat experiences, especially in Kenya and Northern Ireland.¹⁵ As Bard O’Neill has noted of these and other ‘classical’

¹³ *US Army Counter-Insurgency Manual, FM3-24*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ David Kilcullen, ‘Counterinsurgency Redux’, *Survival*, Vol.48 No.4 (Winter 2006-07), p.111.

¹⁵ Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping* (St Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2006 [1971]).

works: ‘there were two kinds of writings on the subject: descriptive and theoretical. Seldom did the two come together.’¹⁶ The former type of work provided historical overviews of events and outcomes (such as Julian Paget’s *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*),¹⁷ whilst the latter sort offered proscriptive ‘how-to’ theoretical manuals for conducting a counter-insurgency campaign that were heavily influenced by their own personal involvement in particular conflicts (Thompson, Galula, and McCuen). Furthermore, these texts were written, either exclusively or to a large extent, in response to Maoist rural insurgencies, which require their own nuanced counter-insurgent response as opposed urban terrorism, for example. Consequentially, the ‘classic’ counter-insurgency literature is narrowly focused upon defeating one variety of a multitude of insurgent strategies. This is a trend that has been fundamentally overhauled in the latest body of literature that has emerged as a result of the war in Iraq. At the forefront of this new wave of literature is a new generation of American so-called ‘warrior-scholars’ who are attempting to redress American military preferences for conventional war planning. General David Petraeus received command of American operations in Iraq in February 2007 and was responsible for authoring large parts of the updated US Army counter-insurgency field manual. Other notable scholars include David Kilcullen, whose piece ‘Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company Level Counter-Insurgency’, that originally appeared in *Military Review*, has now been emailed to every company commander in the field in Iraq¹⁸; Robert Cassidy, whose research has focused on how military cultures have indisposed superpowers, in particular the US,

¹⁶ Bard O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Dulles, VA: Brassey’s, 1990), p.ix.

¹⁷ Julian Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning* (London: Faber, 1967).

¹⁸ David Kilcullen, ‘Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level Counter-Insurgency’, *Military Review*, (May-June 2006), pp.103-08. A piece on Kilcullen’s influence on US counter-insurgency strategy appeared in *The Sunday Times News Review*, ‘Lawrence of Arabia takes on the Taliban’, 11 March 2007.

from imbibing counter-insurgency lessons¹⁹; and Thomas Hammes who has attempted to contextualise insurgencies in the wider landscape of human warfare.²⁰ It remains to be seen whether this level of scholarship into the cause and effects of insurgencies and the nature of the required response will be maintained after the eventual withdrawal of the coalition forces from Iraq and Afghanistan in a similar vein to the trend witnessed after the US left Vietnam. However, what this new body of literature has done is to evolve our understanding of the fundamental nature of counter-insurgency. It has transcended the essentially anti-Maoist strategies developed by the original pioneers of counter-insurgency, providing strategists and policy-makers alike with a relevant appraisal of the evolved nature of the contemporary insurgent threat and the need to adapt the response accordingly. The presence of 24-hour international news coverage and the globalised, networked insurgent threat facing American and British military forces has invalidated previous tenets of irregular warfare doctrine such as population resettlement. Certain elements of the doctrine remain universal, such as the need for close civil-military relations, yet this latest body of counter-insurgency literature has achieved the modernisation of the central tenets of asymmetric war. The new manifestation of the importance of understanding the culture of the population in which counter-insurgency operations are being conducted has become a central theme of the new generation of thinkers, shifting analysis away from the 'classical' focus upon tactical and organizational approaches. This new 'cultural revolution'²¹ in counter-insurgency analysis is even enshrined in the new US Army counter-insurgency field manual. As Beatrice Heuser

¹⁹ Robert M. Cassidy, *Counter-Insurgency and the Global War on Terror: Military Culture and Irregular War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006).

²⁰ Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the Twenty-First Century* (St Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2004).

²¹ Beatrice Heuser, 'The Cultural Revolution in Counter-Insurgency', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.30 No.1 (February 2007), pp.153-171.

has stated, it has reached a stage in the contemporary literature whereby references to the ‘classical’ works are ‘a case of pacifying the worshippers of the old god when building a temple to the new god.’²²

So why for so long has counter-insurgency research found itself separated from mainstream security and strategic studies literature? There are several possibilities. Firstly, I suggest that it is because the rules of the game in irregular conflict differs to that of conventional warfare, which has come to dominate Western military thought over the last half century, and hence has dictated academic research agendas for the most part. In addition, the temporal realm of counter-insurgency is more elastic than conventional warfare. Such conflicts are often measured in years (possibly decades) not months, obfuscating conceptions of an identifiable ‘victory’, thus rendering counter-insurgency far more difficult to analyse and theorise.²³ Furthermore, counter-insurgency research has tended to be the preserve of historians and not strategists therefore negating the necessity for forward-thinking planning.²⁴ Another reason offered here for the peripheral nature of counter-insurgency research is that much of the literature has been the result of temporary scholarship in the area. Widely cited works, such as Charles Townshend’s *Britain’s Civil Wars* and Richard Stubbs’ *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla War*, have epitomized how excellent scholarship in the area has been but a momentary focus for many academics before attention has been diverted elsewhere.²⁵ Despite the prolific output and determined

²² Ibid, p.166.

²³ For a discussion of the temporal realm of counter-insurgency see Christophe Pasco, ‘The Influence of “Time” on Counter-Insurgency’, *Defence Studies*, Vol.8 No.1 (March 2008), pp.49-77.

²⁴ Beckett, ‘The Study of Counter-Insurgency’, p.52.

²⁵ Charles Townshend, *Britain’s Civil Wars: Counter-Insurgency in the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber, 1986); Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla War: The Malayan Emergency* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004).

presence of the likes of Ian Beckett, Thomas Mockaitis and John Newsinger in the field, counter-insurgency research has a longevity problem. Attention is sporadic and invariably case-specific. This latter factor can largely be accredited to the fact that some of the best research on counter-insurgency has been produced by area specialists (such as Middle East expert Clive Jones' work on the insurgency in Yemen, or African specialist Caroline Elkins' studies of the Mau Mau uprising), therefore limiting the scope for applied counter-insurgency analysis across a multitude of cases and preventing overarching frameworks of analysis from being formulated.²⁶ It is hoped that this thesis can go some way in redressing this imbalance.

There does, however, remain an academic trend within counter-insurgency research that is primarily historical in its methodology and analysis (for example, John Newsinger's useful yet limited *British Counterinsurgency*).²⁷ Yet the scope of this thesis, tracking the development and consistencies in British counter-insurgency campaigns over the past sixty years and exposing its consistent inconsistencies, contends that history is not enough. History alone cannot help us explain and understand recent British strategy in Iraq. The historical literature fails to provide an adequate framework of analysis for us to evaluate the effectiveness of strategic and tactical development from one insurgency to another. Furthermore, there has been a propensity to focus solely on counter-insurgency as a one-way process, analysing just the actions of the state army and security forces. The failure to interpret counter-

²⁶ Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War – Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins: Foreign Policy and the Limits of Covert Action* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004); Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).

²⁷ John Newsinger, *British Counter-Insurgency* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

insurgency as an inter-active process between insurgent and counter-insurgent, where the strategy, tactics and resourcefulness of the former are as important to the outcome of an insurgency as that of the latter, has revealed that counter-insurgency, as a sub-field of strategic studies, is suffering from a paucity of analytical understanding. Therefore, in order to rectify this hole in counter-insurgency analysis this thesis will reflect not only the imperative of understanding the factors relating to the insurgent group themselves, but will also identify the key factors that lend counter-insurgents the tools with which to contain, suppress and eliminate an insurgency. Bearing all these omissions and deficiencies of counter-insurgency literature in mind, the 'tri-partite model' is intended to provide an original framework through which we can observe and explain the way in which the British, in counter-insurgency terms, have been slow to learn and have belatedly achieved strategic cohesion.

Explaining the Model

The First Dimension: Counter-Insurgency Forces

The Military Element

Counter-insurgency poses a unique military problem. Such campaigns lack the decisive strategic goals of conventional war between state armies and contain an

overtly political endgame. Counter-insurgencies are fought for, what Rupert Smith has labelled, ‘softer, more malleable, complex, sub-strategic objectives’, whereby the ultimate aim is not to take and hold territory, but to establish the conditions under which the counter-insurgent state can fulfil its political objectives.²⁸ Counter-insurgency is therefore strategically sensitive. It has its own rules. The application of conventional concepts of warfare is at best redundant, at worst counter-productive. As Eliot Cohen rightly pointed out in the mid-1980s, small wars such as counter-insurgency campaigns are ‘not “half” a war, but rather a completely different kind of conflict.’²⁹ Counter-insurgency therefore requires a different military doctrine, altered military expectations of ‘victory’, a diffusion of manpower and resources, and crucially, an inherent tactical flexibility that is sensitive to the variations in threat in different areas and avoids a blanket response. This will then allow for a variance of tactics to be utilised if, for example, the military is fighting concomitant urban and rural-based insurgencies (as in Aden and South Arabia). Aggressive search and destroy missions in isolated areas of insurgent-controlled countryside would certainly be unsuitable and erroneous if employed in built-up areas with a high density of civilians unsympathetic to the insurgent cause who are vital to the broader battle for ‘hearts and minds’. Conventional ‘search and hold’ operations must be conducted alongside small-unit operations, especially in populated areas, therefore allowing for the more discriminate location and elimination of insurgent cells. Yet the importance of harnessing such tactical innovations for use in future conflicts is rendered useless unless the military accepts the critical notion of transferring counter-insurgency lessons. Effective armed forces in counter-insurgency campaigns are forced, through

²⁸ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2006), p.270.

²⁹ Eliot A. Cohen, ‘Constraints on America’s Conduct of Small Wars’, *International Security*, Vol.9 No.2 (Autumn 1984), p.167.

the painful lessons of history, to become successful ‘learning institutions’ where a reflexive military culture is fostered in order to assess tactical accomplishments and deficiencies and imbibe them into strategic thinking for future conflicts.³⁰ This does not mean that the military is always preparing to fight the last war, but in fact means that it is historically conscious of previous successes or failures that can aid the planning and conduct of the contemporary conflict by providing perspective and context.³¹ All counter-insurgencies are scenario specific with their own detailed casual factors, demographic appeal and political demands, however to deny that certain strategic and tactical elements of a counter-insurgency approach are not transferable is to be blind to the utility of history and put to waste valuable and hard-learned lessons of past conflicts regarding, for example, the importance of a sound politico-military strategy, the axiomatic nature of a good intelligence infrastructure, and the need to keep the population safe.³² Again, neologism can be a dangerous thing. Asymmetric conflict, inclusive of counter-insurgency, has been a constant form of warfare despite paradigmatic shifts through different ‘generations’ of warfare. Indeed, current analysis of ‘Fourth Generation Warfare’ places asymmetric conflict at the forefront of understanding contemporary war.³³ As the case studies go on to demonstrate, transferring counter-insurgency lessons has been sporadic in the British case.

³⁰ For a comparative study on the military cultures in counter-insurgency scenarios of the American, British and Russian armies, see Cassidy, *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror*.

³¹ For an evaluation of the benefits of learning from past lessons see Robert R. Tones, ‘Relearning Counter-Insurgency Warfare’, *Parameters*, Vol. 34 (Spring 2004), pp.16-28. For a refutation of the utility of lessons from the ‘classic’ counter-insurgency era for the contemporary age see David Kilcullen, ‘Counter-Insurgency *Redux*’, pp.111-112.

³² Paul Melshen, ‘Mapping Out a Counterinsurgency Campaign Plan: Critical Considerations in Counterinsurgency Campaigning’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.18 No.4 (December 2007), p.667-98.

³³ See especially Hammes, *The Sling and The Stone*.

The centre of gravity for any counter-insurgency campaign is the population, ensuring that plans for a military assault upon the enemy have to be couched in terms of protecting the civilian population and preserving their trust. For this reason the concepts of ‘minimum force’ and ‘hearts and minds’ have become integral to the British conduct of counter-insurgency campaigns.

Central to the British Army’s traditional espousal of an ethos of ‘minimum force’ in its conduct is the principle of restraint. As Rod Thornton points out: ‘the quality of force... has to be seen to be more important than its quantity.’³⁴ Thornton argues that this is the by-product of ethical Victorian values combined with ingrained pragmatism through centuries of imperial policing. The public outrage at the Amritsar massacre in 1919 certainly impacted upon the future conduct of the British Army and marks a turning point in the level of force used by the military in trouble spots. Thornton’s conception of Victorian evangelicalism leading to gentlemanly conduct does, however, overlook the unavoidable inculcation of imperial racism, a metropolitan superiority complex, into the Army’s outlook, that led to on-going subjugation and repression. The chivalrous behaviour of British polite society could never be transferred to conflict zones around the world. The Empire was not built on altruism. This is why Thornton’s secondary emphasis on experience at imperial policing retains far more credence as an explanatory tool. Such experience fostered a realisation that the Empire could not be maintained by violence and that a balance needed to be struck between preserving a forcible military presence yet only utilising it as a last resort. The same principle still holds true in the post-colonial era. As John

³⁴ Rod Thornton, ‘The British Army and the Origins of its Minimum Force Philosophy’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.15 No.1 (Spring 2004), p.84.

Lynn points out in regard to excessive use of force in contemporary counter-insurgency, it only serves to generate ‘the three R’s: resentment, resistance and revenge.’³⁵ Analysis of counter-insurgency campaigns, whether British, American or French, clearly reveals a link between the appropriate use of force and the level of military *and* political strategic success. There are implications for heavy-handed counter-insurgency conduct (just look at the French in Algeria) as it fuels what Martha Crenshaw labelled the ‘action-reaction syndrome’, whereby violence becomes cyclical, ratcheted by corresponding strike and counter-strike.³⁶ In a specifically British context, Thomas Mockaitis has no qualms in arguing that: ‘it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the principle of minimum force to British counter-insurgency.’³⁷ Its importance is unquestioned, but it is its actual application that will be evaluated throughout the case studies.³⁸ In an age now where the conduct of counter-insurgency operations is under the constant critical scrutiny of international law, the 24-hour global media, human rights groups and other NGOs, the concept of minimum force, with all its permutations of the absence of civilian casualties and the expectations of operational legitimacy, has never been under more intense observation.

³⁵ John Lynn, ‘Patterns of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency’, *Military Review* (July-August 2005), p.27.

³⁶ Martha Crenshaw, ‘The Causes of Terrorism’, *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 13 No.4 (July 1981), p.385.

³⁷ Mockaitis, ‘The Origins of British Counter-Insurgency’, p.213.

³⁸ For a particularly rigorous exchange on the application of minimum force during the Mau Mau uprising see John Newsinger, ‘Minimum Force, British Counter-Insurgency and the Mau Mau Rebellion’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 3 No.1 (Spring 1992), pp.47-57, who points to the high levels of brutality and wonton force used by the British, and Thomas Mockaitis, ‘Minimum Force, British Counter-Insurgency and the Mau Mau Rebellion: A Reply’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.3 No.2 (Autumn 1992), pp.87-89, who defends British restraint.

A second factor key to the military conduct of British counter-insurgency, and central to strategic planning, is that of winning civilian ‘hearts and minds’. In short, this is an adherence to military and political principles that imbibe confidence in the indigenous population as to the counter-insurgent’s strength and competence whilst concomitantly delegitimising the insurgents appeal. As David Kilcullen has succinctly stated: ‘Hearts means persuading people their best interests are served by your success; minds means convincing them that you can protect them, and that resisting them is futile.’³⁹ An overt emphasis on ‘hearts and minds’ dominated counter-insurgency theory in the early 1960s in the wake of the British campaign in Malaya. It was widely accepted that the domestic population had to be placated, offered security, have their living standard maintained if not raised, and even granted more political rights. Yet as US involvement in Vietnam escalated in the mid-1960s the prominence granted to ‘hearts and minds’ diminished in favour of instituting a *quid pro quo* between the military and the population whereby concessions and improvements were only granted if co-operation was forthcoming from the communities.⁴⁰ This failure to acknowledge the importance of the battle of ideas in a counter-insurgency campaign cost the American’s dearly, and should be treated as a cautionary lesson in the dangers of undermining the importance of ‘hearts and minds’ to a counter-insurgency strategy. As Robert Taber quips of counter-insurgent forces: ‘they must be wooers as well as doers.’⁴¹

³⁹ Kilcullen, ‘Twenty-Eight Articles’, p.105.

⁴⁰ Long, *On ‘Other War’*, pp.23-27.

⁴¹ Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea: Guerrilla Warfare in Theory and Practice* (St Albans: Paladin, 1970), p.26.

‘Hearts and minds’ is both an ideational and material concept. Counter-insurgent authorities are obliged to shore up ideological support within a population for the political system they are preserving or installing whilst also legally, socially and politically invalidating the ideological premise of the insurgency, be it communism in Malaya or jihadist Islamism in Iraq. Parallel to the battle for ideas must be an on-going process to improve the material lives of the population. This can be achieved in a number of ways, yet first and foremost it is the ability to provide security. Shelter from violence and the protection of their means of living is an essential function the counter-insurgent forces must fulfil – if they don’t then the insurgents will. Engineering works to the national infrastructure also emit an aura of competence and security, particularly if basic provisions such as water, electricity and garbage collection can be maintained in the face of on-going insurgent attacks. This is perhaps where the American-led coalition in Iraq initially faltered in its battle to win ‘hearts and minds’, given that water supplies in Iraq only reached half of all households and that electricity supplies ran at around half the actual demand, indeed falling below pre-war levels for a period in early 2006.⁴² This situation demonstrates that ‘hearts and minds’ are won when actions speak louder than words.⁴³ But perhaps the most telling element of the British approach to ‘hearts and minds’ is that it was an explicitly coercive process too – the two dynamics need not be dichotomised.⁴⁴ We need look no further than the ‘New Villages’ in Malaya to see just how the forcible resettlement of segments of the population (half a million rural squatters in

⁴² BBC News Online report, ‘Life in Iraq’, November 2006

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/in_depth/post_saddam_iraq/html/1.stm

⁴³ For an advocacy of a ‘hearts and minds’ counter-insurgency strategy, based on computational modelling of conflict outcomes in the past, see Michael G. Findley and Joseph K. Young, ‘Fighting Fire with Fire? How (Not) to Neutralize an Insurgency’, *Civil Wars*, Vol.9 No.4 (December 2007), pp.378-401.

⁴⁴ Kelly M. Greenhill and Paul Staniland, ‘Ten Ways to Lose at Counterinsurgency’, *Civil Wars*, Vol.9 No.4 (December 2007), p.404.

this case) was achieved under the guise of offering them land rights and modern amenities to placate any objections. When population control becomes an element of the counter-insurgency military strategy, it is invariably sugar-coated in order to offset the potential detrimental effect on the wider battle for 'hearts and minds'. Indeed, one of the key tools with which to wage this wider battle is an effective propaganda campaign. By utilising the widest possible communication methods, visual, audio and electronic, the counter-insurgency authorities are able to undertake a double-edged information war that both *dissuades* insurgents from continuing their campaign and the public from supporting them, as well as *incentivises* disillusioned insurgents to surrender and shores up popular support for the authorities. It may seem obvious, but the most effective way to win the hearts and minds of the population is through their eyes and ears. What they see and hear influences their allegiances, hence the importance of a rigorous information campaign.

One of the most crucial, yet often under-evaluated, elements in most counter-insurgency military strategies is the utilisation of indigenous troops for intelligence and political purposes.⁴⁵ Local forces in irregular conflicts not only strengthen the quantity of troops available for operations, but also allows for an intelligence dividend to be reaped by tapping into local knowledge, culture and language that arises through joint training and patrolling. Yet it is not just indigenous regular troops that the British have traditionally cultivated for an 'over-watch' role preceding a military withdrawal. A notable pattern in British counter-insurgency has been the

⁴⁵ A recent illumination on this under-explored issue is Geraint Hughes and Christian Tripodi, 'Anatomy of a Surrogate: Historical Precedents and Implications for Contemporary Counter-Insurgency and Counter-Terrorism', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.20 No.1 (March 2009), pp.1-35.

use of irregular indigenous fighters, mainly via the utilisation of ‘turned’ insurgents. So called ‘pseudo operations’ have proved to be an effective component to the military side of counter-insurgency campaigns. In such operations surrendered or captured insurgents, in conjunction with government forces, return to an insurgent-controlled area posing as an insurgent unit. These operations can be valuable militarily, in the instance of an armed assault, and especially in terms of reaping intelligence on future operations and the whereabouts of key leaders should the pseudo-gang be accepted and ingratiated into the insurgent organisation. Such groups can also plant false information in order to cause operational disfunction or induce surrender.⁴⁶ The use of ‘turned’ insurgents can be seen throughout the case studies employed in this thesis, from the ‘running dogs’ in Malaya to the ‘Freds’ in Northern Ireland, and will be emphasised as an integral element to the military conduct of British counter-insurgency campaigns.

One key constitutive element of the ‘Tri-Partite Model’ to point out is the placement of the police, and policing duties, under the military banner. This is because, as Charles Townshend articulates, ‘as a hybrid form of conflict it [counter-insurgency] calls for a synthesis of police and military skills.’⁴⁷ The Army is often called in to fulfil the role of military aid to the civil power, which requires a quasi-policing function, such as law enforcement and keeping the peace. Concomitantly, the police fulfil quasi-military roles, primarily through being one of the prime intelligence-gathering agencies in a counter-insurgency campaign. With their local contacts and

⁴⁶ For example see Lawrence E. Cline, Strategic Studies Institute report, ‘Pseudo Operations and Counter-Insurgency: Lessons from Other Countries’ (Carlisle, PA: June 2005). For detailed analysis from one of the first vocal exponents of the use of pseudo-gangs in counter-insurgency see Frank Kitson, *Gangs and Counter-Gangs* (London: Barrie and Rockcliff, 1960).

⁴⁷ Townshend, *Britain’s Civil Wars*. p.27.

knowledge of a particular area the police can act by detaining known or suspected supporters of the political wing or facilitators of the supply network of an insurgent group. In short, local police forces in counter-insurgency campaigns are crucial for fulfilling the wider military strategy of constraining the activities of the insurgent group, whilst the military are constantly required to act as a *de facto* police force in order to maintain the security of the wider population, who themselves are the fulcrum of any counter-insurgency campaign.

The Political Element

All insurgencies are inherently political by nature, seeking the imposition of their political creed and structure over a particular region, society or country. Consequentially, the counter-insurgent response is also inexplicably political as nation-states seek to assert (or reassert) their authority in the face of a threat to their monopoly of violence. The overarching counter-insurgency strategy will always be constitutive of a large political element, namely to achieve a reduction and eventual eradication of the threat to state control or a particular sphere of interest. In counter-insurgency scenarios, therefore, the military battle is highly politicised. Clausewitzian truisms regarding war and politics are still applicable to asymmetric counter-insurgencies. David Kilcullen has gone as far as to state that: ‘Modern counter-insurgency may be 100% political.’⁴⁸ Although his calculations may be high, his point is well made – political considerations, sensitivities, and necessities are

⁴⁸ Kilcullen, ‘Counterinsurgency *Redux*’, p.123.

omnipresent in a counter-insurgency campaign. This is not a new phenomena. Whilst Western states attempted to counter Maoist rural insurgencies in the 1960s and 1970s it was also noted, lucidly by David Galula, that: ‘so intricate is the interplay between the political and the military actions that they cannot be tidily separated.’⁴⁹ It is the political masters who send in the military to reassert control; it is the political masters who assess the strategic threats posed by insurgent groups to the national interest; it is the political master’s electoral sensitivities that impinge upon the longevity of the military campaign. As the case studies will go on to demonstrate, counter-insurgency campaigns are initiated, conducted, and curtailed by the hidden hand of politicians. As General Sir Rupert Smith has rightly noted: ‘(P)olitical considerations provide the context for the strategy... (M)ilitary considerations and actions must always work within and contribute to the political purpose.’⁵⁰

However, it is not just the central control of the wider counter-insurgency campaign that asserts the importance of the political dimension. The introduction of sound political practice on the ground in the country facing the insurgent threat is essential too. Representative government lends legitimacy to the campaign, mutually providing a political vision for the future that the indigenous population of all races, tribes and religious groupings can rally behind, whilst undermining the insurgent’s appeal to represent the ‘people’. Thomas X. Hammes is correct in his assertion that: ‘The fundamental weapon in counterinsurgency remains good governance.’⁵¹ This was evident in Malaya, for example, as the ethnic Chinese, the mainstay of the

⁴⁹ Galula, *Counter-Insurgency Warfare*, p.5.

⁵⁰ Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p.214.

⁵¹ Thomas X. Hammes, ‘Countering Evolved Insurgent Networks’, *Military Review* (July-August 2006), pp.20-21.

insurgent Malayan Communist Party, were brought into the electoral franchise, given political rights hitherto not granted, and sought to foster a mainstream, non-Communist political party that provided a platform for Chinese opinion. Attempts in Iraq to foster a multi-party, multi-sect government have proved an essential, although ultimately as yet unfulfilled, element of the strategy in Iraq.

Whilst the military threat needs to be dealt with, the population will inevitably demand political representation by their own kith and kin. Prolonged and centralised political control by an external counter-insurgent force, especially as decolonisation became a seemingly unstoppable reality, ran the risk of jeopardising the necessity of winning indigenous 'hearts and minds' by destroying the trust bestowed by the population upon the counter-insurgent forces as both guarantors of security and amenities as well as creators of a new political order in which they will have a greater say. Making political provisions for the mainstream ethnic and religious groups has long been a reality in British counter-insurgency as it lends the wider campaign a degree of legitimacy, and ensures that it is seen to be both constructive (in terms of building new institutions and improving the infrastructure) and as well as destructive (in terms of eradicating the insurgent threat militarily). Illegitimate or controversial political control and management of a counter-insurgency campaign will inevitably aggravate an insurgency leading to a deterioration in the security situation. Just note how the extended political control of the Provisional Coalition Authority in Iraq under Paul Bremer in the wake of Saddam's downfall quickly turned notions of the coalition troops as liberators into that of occupiers.

Close civil-military relations are vital for ensuring that a co-ordinated and coherent combined counter-insurgency strategy is implemented efficiently and effectively. Britain's historical experiences, notably stemming from Malaya during the 1950s, have demonstrated the need for close civil-military liaison, particularly through a decentralised, committee-based decision-making structure. This reflects the inescapably political nature of counter-insurgency and ensures that the military campaign is commensurate with overarching political objectives. Therefore it is at the level of civil-military relations that the two primary planks of any counter-insurgency strategy – the political and the kinetic – coalesce, with the cohesion of this relationship proving vital to the efficacy of the campaign as a whole. This is axiomatic to strategic 'success' given the widely acknowledged reality that counter-insurgency campaigns are not won by outright military force alone (of which the 2009 Sri Lankan Army repression of the Tamil Tigers stands as a bloody and controversial anomaly) but requires significant civilian input into building governance structures and undertaking reconstruction plans. As David Kilcullen memorably puts it: 'counter-insurgency is armed social work.'⁵² This requires, therefore, both civilian and military unity of effort.

However, such unity of effort cannot be achieved unless adequate resources are provided to civilian counter-insurgency work if the non-kinetic instruments of influence, such as reconstruction projects, are to prove effective. This was arguably a barrier thrown up between close civil-military relations in Iraq, where severely restricted financial resources hindered cross-agency co-operation as each organisation sought to fulfil its own purview with a limited budget at the expense of

⁵² Kilcullen, 'Twenty-Eight Articles', p.107.

pooling resources. The civilian role in counter-insurgency should not be reduced simply to development-oriented work designed to make the life of the military easier by being a friendly ‘follow on force’, but should be seen as a fundamental facilitator of essential counter-insurgency tenets such as building population resistance to insurgent narratives, strengthening host nation governance structures, as well as the obvious need to improve the material well-being of indigenous communities via reconstruction work – goals that the military themselves are also seeking to fulfil in parallel. Close civil-military relations, based on common goals, effective communication and good working relationships, are therefore at the heart of the security-development nexus, particularly when we assess the whole gamut of civilian input into a counter-insurgency campaign, from reconstruction to humanitarian work, from central political leadership to on-the-ground diplomacy. The spectrum of such civilian involvement in irregular warfare does however flag up the importance of heightened civilian and not just military education as to the particular nuances and complexities of counter-insurgency warfare.⁵³ Undeniably, counter-insurgency does blur the traditional ‘lanes of authority’ that in times of regular warfare have notionally delineated civilian management of a campaign and the military execution of it. Yet this challenge to redefine civil-military relations within the context of irregular warfare is one that the British have, throughout the case studies employed in this study, not entirely conquered. Consistent restrictions on military resources by civilian politicians have proven to be a major thorn in the side of cohesive relations, whilst the political supremacy of strategic planning, attained arguably during the South Arabian campaign, has ensured friction at senior levels of civilian and military leadership.

⁵³ Patrick M. Cronin, ‘Irregular Warfare: New Challenges for Civil-Military Relations’, *Strategic Forum*, No.234 (October 2008), p.1.

The two main traditional schools of thought regarding civil-military relations have coalesced around two of the scholars to first theorise on the topic, Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz. These pioneers in this field retained an essentially domestic quality to their understanding of civil-military relations, defining it primarily in terms of the military's relation to the state as a political entity, and not necessarily as an assessment of working relations between the military and civilian workers in theatres of operation (an interpretation of civil-military relations that this thesis will adopt).⁵⁴ The Huntingtonian School disaggregates the military from the political sphere, denying a link between military means for political ends. Huntington depicts members of the military as subordinate servants of the political state and argues for an explicit distinction between the way political decisions on matters of conflict are reached and the way in which those decisions are carried out by the armed forces. In short, there is to be no political encroachment on military affairs.⁵⁵ This is maintained, argued Huntington, because the military's inherent sense of professionalism and its outlook of conservative realism, allowed for a separate military sphere to develop.

Conversely, the Janowitzean School advocates that the military establishment imbibe political sensitivities into their own professional outlook. Consequentially, Janowitz argues, military understanding of overarching political imperatives would be achieved via the integration of political and military leadership. In Janowitz's more

⁵⁴ Frederick Rosen, 'Third Generation Civil-Military Relations and the "New Revolution in Military Affairs"', *Danish Institute for International Studies working paper*, No.3 (2009), p.7.

⁵⁵ Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Practice of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957).

sophisticated interpretation, the military retains close links with the state whom they serve and the society whom they protect. This is reflected, Janowitz maintains, in the transition of Western militaries in the twentieth century into highly professional forces whose application of kinetic activity is now tightly controlled, in part due to political necessity.⁵⁶

These two models can broadly account for the differences in civil-military relations in a historical counter-insurgency context between the US and UK. The Americans have traditionally fostered a Huntingtonian relationship, with a deliberate and warily maintained division of civilian and military responsibilities and leadership within the Pentagon (a factor that has arguably led to many of the post-war problems in Iraq). Conversely, the British have developed a set-up akin to the Janowitzean model, nurturing the cohesion of civilian and military personnel in the defence decision-making process in Whitehall.⁵⁷ The nature of this particular variation of warfare has proved that as the military and political side of the battle are inter-twined, then so must the respective branches of civilian and military leadership. Close civil-military relations are therefore requisite in counter-insurgency and can take one of two forms: visible civil-military relations, such as joint reconstruction projects, provide the 'observable physical interface' between the two spheres and this can engender public perceptions of a 'comprehensive approach' at work; whilst non-visible civil-military relations provide essential cross-agency liaison on issues such as operational

⁵⁶ Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: The Free Press, 1960).

⁵⁷ Robert Egnell, 'Explaining US and British Performance in Complex Expeditionary Operations: The Civil-Military Dimension', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.29 No.6 (December 2006), pp.1049-1053.

planning, intelligence co-operations and economic provision.⁵⁸ Unity of effort in both forms of civil-military relations are bound to make the most effective use of the different strengths and expertise that the various branches of the military and the multivariate civilian agencies bring. Close civil-military relations simply reflect the political nature of the beast – a beast that British governments throughout the twentieth, and into the twenty-first, century have shied away from taming, often preferring to cut and run (as in South Arabia and Iraq) or accept an uncomfortable stalemate (such as Northern Ireland during the Troubles). The political management of British counter-insurgency is presented in this thesis as inconsistent, which in itself has played a large part in creating the conditions for strategic inertia counter-productive to the attainment of ‘success’.

But what constitutes ‘success’ in counter-insurgency warfare? In short, success in counter-insurgency is compromise. Often, best case outcomes are achieving what is realistically attainable once a campaign is underway rather than attempting to meet idealised targets created in advance. Asymmetric warfare is fluid and complex in nature, rendering concepts of ‘success’ as defined in regular warfare entirely nebulous. Campaign success will of course boil down to the question of whether insurgent violence has been curtailed sufficiently. Yet the impact of several factors impinge on the qualitative nature of such success, particularly time, political goal-post shifting and altered public expectation of what ‘success’ looks like. Taking these issues into consideration, we can see that ‘success’ in Malaya took twelve years to achieve – a timeframe almost unthinkable in today’s media-intensive world. ‘Success’ against the Mau Mau came at the price of indiscriminate detention and

⁵⁸ Rosen, ‘Third Generation Civil-Military Relations’, p.8.

heavy-handed policing – an aberration of minimum force, ‘hearts and minds’-oriented campaigning. There was no success to talk of in South Arabia given the alacrity of the politically-dictated withdrawal and the failure to suppress insurgent violence. To speak of ‘success’ in relation to Northern Ireland is to couch it heavily in terms of compromise. The IRA was never militarily defeated – hence talk of an ‘acceptable level of violence’ being maintained - rather its political wing was forced to realise the inevitability of peace negotiations and power-sharing given wider societal revulsion at on-going violence. Having Sinn Fein partially control the Executive branch of government in Northern Ireland would certainly not have been an original tenet of campaign ‘success’ in Northern Ireland at the start of Operation Banner, yet given the effects of time and political necessity, it became the most practical and achievable solution for ending violence. Compromise of a different sort, however, came to characterise politico-military claims of ‘success’ in southern Iraq. Negotiating from a position of weakness given the military inability to curb militia violence, the British stuck a deal with the Shia insurgents allowing the Army to withdraw from Basra, effectively surrendering the city to the militias whilst enabling the British to point to a transfer of security responsibilities to the newly trained Iraqi Army and police force. The Iraqi case alone openly demonstrates the utterly subjective nature of the constructs of campaign ‘success’ in counter-insurgency terms. The political acceptance of the inevitability of decolonisation led to a permissive political exit strategy (i.e. independence for Malaya and Kenya) being utilised to undermine insurgent political plans. This is the fortunate context under which British Army were conducting campaigns in the 1950s and 1960s and stands in stark contrast to the French experience in Indo-China and Algeria, for example, where the French aggressively opposed the process of decolonisation and

therefore committed themselves to a concept of strategic success that could only entail an outright military defeat of the insurgency and not permit a politically-stage managed withdrawal. Perhaps we should therefore conceive of success in counter-insurgency terms as simply being able to acknowledge what is practically achievable given firstly, the temporal expanse of irregular campaigns (as mentioned earlier, often measured in decades not years), secondly, the intractability of insurgencies who draw on their support from the populations and the way this creates different characteristics of victory as opposed to that when facing a regular enemy, and thirdly, the subsequent futility to harnessing metrics as a means of measuring counter-insurgency progress. Unlike in regular warfare there is no discernable point of enemy surrender, no victory ceremony, no official declaration of peace. Simplistic counting of the number of attacks carried out against counter-insurgent forces, the number of civilian deaths, or the number of newly trained indigenous police officers may provide quantitative comfort for commanders and politicians, yet they fail to assess the qualitative impact counter-insurgency tactics are having on the motives behind insurgent violence. Statistics cannot measure the tangible outputs of counter-insurgency – in other words, the psychological and not just physical impact of political, economic and military efforts. It is easy to mistake action for progress.⁵⁹ Success in counter-insurgency, therefore, is constructed of a subjective interpretation of an eradication of insurgent violence, however this is often the result of overt political compromise, which questions whether ‘success’ is therefore the right word to describe a strategic outcome. This certainly holds true in the British cases viewed here.

⁵⁹ Cronin, ‘Irregular Warfare’, p.2.

The Intelligence Element

At the heart of each civil-military counter-insurgency campaign must lie an efficient, decentralised and well-integrated intelligence network. Not only does intelligence provide the basis for the launch of pin-point military operations, offering information on insurgent location, likely strength and movement, it also aids the political side of the campaign, revealing schisms within enemy political leadership, as well as establishing the political acceptability or likely civilian acquiescence towards a particular operation or policy. In short, intelligence proves itself to be integrally inter-connected with the military and political dimensions of any counter-insurgency campaign. As Michael Howard has succinctly stated: ‘Without hearts and minds one cannot obtain intelligence, and without intelligence terrorists can never be defeated.’⁶⁰ Therefore, intelligence must be seen as both a by-product of other successfully implemented counter-insurgency tactics (such as hearts and minds, or an influential propaganda campaign) as well as a catalyst for direct military, or indirect political, action. Yet the frequent failure to establish effective intelligence structures swiftly became one of the primary retardants to building an effective strategy across numerous British counter-insurgency campaigns.

The primary intelligence gatherers in colonial British counter-insurgency operations have been indigenous police forces, who were then assisted by a British-established

⁶⁰ Michael Howard, ‘What’s in a Name? How to Fight Terrorism’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.81 No.1 (January/February 2002), p.10.

Special Branch and, on occasions, MI5 and MI6. Recent operations in Iraq still relied on intelligence collected by local police officers in conjunction with other military sources. The need for combined police-military action in counter-insurgency operations stems from the particular need to adapt to the nuances of asymmetric warfare among the people, and as a means of bridging the divide between the purposes of the two institutions. The gathering of information on suspected or known insurgents (and equally crucially their supply and support network) lends itself to the methodical and legalist work of minimum force policing. An insurgency can thus be undermined outside the conflict zone. However, the combative nature of insurgencies requires the use of lethal force – a role reserved for the military. Therefore, the dual imperative in counter-insurgency operations of not alienating the indigenous population whilst concomitantly subduing and eliminating an insurgent group requires the parallel utilisation of effective community policing (necessary for intelligence gathering and ‘population control’ in a mainly protective sense) and targeted military operations that strike at insurgent cells or strongholds. This balance is by no means an easy one to find or maintain, particularly given the jealously guarded fiefdoms of intelligence, however the clear benefits of co-operation will be noted throughout the upcoming case studies, as will the belated nature of its implementation.

The essential peacekeeping role played by the police and the military’s desire for ‘contact’ intelligence need not be mutually exclusive, especially given the evident link between the legitimate conduct of a counter-insurgency campaign as a mode of winning civilian ‘hearts and minds’ and the absence of aggressive patrolling and misguided stop-and-searches as a result of an intelligence vacuum. Security forces

are therefore keen to build bridges with a local community in order to foster an environment conducive to intelligence gathering within the population, especially given the evident importance of localised intelligence. As Frank Kitson stated in the 1970s: ‘a lot of low grade information is more use tactically than a small amount of high grade material.’⁶¹ However, a paucity of intelligence should not be licence to adopt more antagonistic population control measures. The introduction of internment in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s proved as much.⁶² Intelligence should therefore be used not only to tap into the ethos and motivations of the aggrieved community in order to develop a greater understanding of the nature of the threat for *political* means, but also in order to accurately assess the insurgents operational capabilities and organisation for practical *military* means. As one contemporary observation of the role of intelligence in operations in Iraq illustratively commented: ‘Without good intelligence, a counterinsurgent is like a blind boxer wasting energy flailing at an unseen opponent.’⁶³

As the role of intelligence in fulfilling military objectives during counter-insurgency campaigns is accepted as crucial, Michael Herman has served to remind us that its relationship with politics has become close in the post-World War Two era, so much so that ‘intelligence became part of the twentieth century growth of government.’⁶⁴ The collection of intelligence for political consumption has formed a crucial aspect in allowing government’s to assess and interpret the strategic intentions, diplomatic

⁶¹ Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations*, p.73.

⁶² For a critique of internment see Caroline Kennedy-Pipe and Andrew Mumford, ‘Torture, Rights, Rules and Wars: Ireland to Iraq’, *International Relations*, Vol.21 No.1 (March 2007), pp.119-126.

⁶³ Elliott Cohen, Conrad Crane, Jan Horvath and John Nagl, ‘Principles, Imperatives and Paradoxes of Counterinsurgency’, *Military Review* (March-April 2006), p.50.

⁶⁴ Michael Herman, ‘Diplomacy and Intelligence’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol.9 No.2 (July 1998), p.4.

initiatives and military capabilities of enemies and allies alike. We can then see how the three factors at the heart of the counter-insurgents' dimension of the 'Tripartite Model' unite when politicised intelligence is used to justify military action. No more obvious or controversial example is necessary than the infamous 'dodgy dossier' heralded by the Blair government as legitimate reasoning to launch the invasion of Iraq in 2003.⁶⁵ The aftermath of this debacle was, and arguably still is, felt in all three communities, especially in the international environment fostered in the wake of 9/11 whereby, as Len Scott and Peter Jackson have noted, 'the relationship between politics and intelligence has never been more important.'⁶⁶

However, such trends are not new. Western policy during the Cold War was driven to a large extent by intelligence analysis of Soviet capabilities, activities and supposed intentions in an effort to widen the missile gap and protect spheres of influence. What is important to consider is that not only does intelligence form a vital crux for political and military decision-making on the grand strategic level, but that it is essential when combating sub-state insurgencies also. The importance of knowledge of an enemy's man and fire-power capabilities, concentration of their forces and intended future targets, does not diminish when applied to asymmetric warfare. Indeed, it may be deemed more critical given the overtly difficult task of infiltrating an insurgent cell, or to collect intelligence on a group so clandestine as to be living among the people, to paraphrase Mao, as a fish within the sea. As a result, intelligence structures have to adapt to an asymmetric conflict environment

⁶⁵ See the Butler Report, 'Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction' (London: TSO, July 2004), <http://www.butlerreview.org.uk/report/report.pdf>

⁶⁶ Len Scott and Peter Jackson, 'Journeys in Shadows', in Len Scott and Peter Jackson (ed), *Understanding Intelligence in the Twenty-First Century: Journeys in Shadows* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.21.

accordingly, in terms of its resource and personnel allocation, collection methods and organisational set-up.⁶⁷

Practically speaking, there are three methods of intelligence gathering in counter-insurgency operations, as identified by Keith Jeffrey: *overt* (collected by uniformed controls on the ground), *confidential* (retrieved largely from detainees under interrogation), and *clandestine* (including undercover or paralegal surveillance). These forms of intelligence are collected by both police and military intelligence units in order to form one of three types of intelligence, either background intelligence to gain a wider picture of the causes of the insurgency, operational intelligence that can guide the military side of the conflict, or criminal intelligence that is aimed largely at individual insurgents or individuals within their supply network in order to bring legal proceedings.⁶⁸ If these methods and typologies of intelligence are successfully used in a collective manner, the intelligence community can provide the military and civilian administration with what I would term ‘information ammunition’ – the practical knowledge and insights with which to directly or indirectly undermine, subdue and eventually suppress an insurgency. But as the case studies will demonstrate, this can only be achieved if the intelligence gathering process fulfils several key criteria: intelligence networks must be grounded in the local community, with a reliable system of protection and rewards in place for indigenous intelligence agents; the intelligence gathering system must be decentralised allowing for localised ‘hot’ intelligence to be acted upon without being

⁶⁷ Kyle Teamey and Jonathan Sweet, ‘Organizing Intelligence for Counterinsurgency’, *Military Review* (September/October 2006), pp.24-9.

⁶⁸ Keith Jeffrey, ‘Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations: Some Reflections on the British Experience’, *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.2 No.1 (1987) pp.129 &141.

lost in a hierarchy of authority; the police, the military and government intelligence agencies must be encouraged to share information at a local and national level, although it is acknowledged that this is easier said than done; and finally, that an absence of intelligence does not legitimise heavy-handed treatment of the local population – accurate intelligence is rarely the product of fear and coercion. The British were not quick to realise the necessity of these factors, however the bearing of intelligence on the outcome of previous counter-insurgencies has been crucial, and Iraq was no exception.

The Second Dimension: Insurgent Forces

Insurgent Organisation

Both the organisational structure and function of an insurgent group are important factors to analyse in regard to the group's overall ability to operate efficiently and effectively as a paramilitary and political movement. It is essential for the counter-insurgent military and civilian authorities to gauge the organisational set-up of the insurgent opposition as it impacts upon how operational orders are constructed, disseminated and executed, as well as affecting the level of strategic competence with which the insurgent group is able to perform, both militarily and politically. Nominally, most insurgent groups are comprised of three main organisational strands: the insurgents (fighting force); the underground (active political wing who

also maintain supply and intelligence network); and the auxiliary (constitutive of the latent support base within the wider population).⁶⁹ Yet it is the way these strands are structured and their functionality that fundamentally affect the ability of the group to achieve its strategic goals as well as shaping the nature of the counter-insurgent response.

Structurally, a whole host of questions come into play. Does the group have a hierarchical or cell structure? Does it have a decentralised or quasi-autonomous leadership? Is the group regionally focussed or does it have a nationwide presence? Are there any rival factions or splinter groups that could affect the potency of the political message or military operations? How well connected are the political and military wings of the group? The answers to such questions, usually provided by background intelligence, helps build up a picture for the political and military communities that will then aid in tailoring a targeted and appropriate counter-insurgency response. For example, a district or regional-based insurgency, such as the Mau Mau uprising in Nairobi and the surrounding White Highlands and Aberdare Mountains, would demand only a concentrated military deployment for the counter-insurgent force. Furthermore, an insurgent group disjointed by rival factions, such as the IRA's various guises (Official, Provisional, Real, and Continuity), is therefore open to a greater degree of exploitation by security forces that play one splinter group off against another, whilst the entire political message of the insurgent cause is being undermined and pulled in different directions. The contemporary insurgent threat posed in Iraq offers a new set of organisational challenges to the counter-

⁶⁹ Adrian Bogart, 'The Nine Principles of Combined Arms Action in a Counterinsurgency Environment', *Military Review* (March-April 2006), p.112.

insurgent coalition. Rupert Smith helpfully applies botanical phraseology when describing Islamist insurgent groups, particularly al-Qaeda, as having ‘rhizomatic’ nervous systems whereby growth derives from the roots even if the root becomes detached from the stem above the ground.⁷⁰ Here, the organisational structure is demonstrable of the group’s wider strategy of transferring their struggle across borders and for a prolonged period – the organisation is self-perpetuating, as is the cause. This, in part, helps explain the ineffectiveness of many British counter-insurgency operations in southern Iraq given the organisational potency of the multivariate insurgent opponents – arguably the first well-organised enemy the British have faced in an asymmetric conflict environment.

Functionally, another set of questions need to be posed in order to assess the effectiveness and efficiency the organisational aspects will have on the insurgency. What is the level of the insurgent group’s preparedness for an uprising? Does it possess a viable propaganda machine capable of the effective dissemination of the political message? Is the political wing of the group a shadow government in waiting? Does the group provide alternative public services to the people, such as health care, schooling or security? Again, an assessment of such factors will reveal the potential potency of the insurgency. It will be seen in the case studies how Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA) fighters in Malaya possessed a relatively high level of preparedness come 1948 after their recent experiences fighting the invading Japanese Imperial Army during World War Two. Therefore, the availability of weapons (ironically supplied by their British colonial rulers during the war and then turned on them in 1948) and the combat experience of many MRLA guerrillas

⁷⁰ Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p.328.

ensured that the British had much difficulty in controlling MRLA violence in the early phases of the campaign and had difficulty gaining the strategic initiative. In contrast, the Mau Mau had low levels of preparedness given their lack of formalised combat experience and their rudimentary weapons. The preparedness of these two groups played a vital role in the achievement of ‘success’ (in terms of eluding and frustrating the security forces) in the crucial opening stage of their respective uprisings.

Insurgent Strategy and Tactics

Broadly speaking, all insurgencies share the same overarching strategic imperative: to repel or overthrow an occupying or ruling military and political order in a particular country or territory and replace it with a system constructed in their own ideological or religious image. Obviously each insurgency is subject to its own strategic nuances, but the endgame is usually the same. Tactically, certain methods have attained a level of permanence in asymmetric warfare. Many insurgencies share a reliance on surprise attacks, constant harassment of the enemy, and an ability to fade into the population. As T.E. Lawrence astutely observed: ‘Our tactics should be tip and run, not pushes but strokes. We should never try and improve an advantage. *We should use the smallest of force in the quickest time at the farthest place.*’⁷¹ This encapsulates the axiomatic maxims of an insurgency, registering the perennial principles of utilising size, speed and distance to your advantage. Insurgent strategy and tactics are born out of the particular exigencies of asymmetric warfare. Engaging

⁷¹ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1997), p.328. Emphasis added.

in armed conflict with a national army with all the states' resources at their disposal requires the adoption of a nuanced tactical arsenal. As Robert Taber memorably describes: '(T)he guerrilla fights the war of the flea, and his enemy suffers the dog's disadvantages: too much to defend; too small, ubiquitous and agile an enemy to come to grips with.'⁷² The most widely cited contributions to the evolution of insurgent tactics have been the communist-inspired, rurally-focussed works of Mao Zedong and Che Guevara. Mao's treatise *On Guerrilla Warfare* was first published in 1937, and contains his guidelines for guerrilla tactics and doctrine that fuelled a generation of rural uprisings. In perhaps the most pertinent Maoist teaching in regard to insurgent tactics, borrowing heavily from Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, Mao urges the need for surprise, speed and stealth:

'In guerrilla warfare, select the tactic of seeming to come from the east and attack from the west; avoid the solid, attack the hollow; attack; withdraw; deliver a lightning blow, seek a lightning decision. When guerrillas engage a stronger enemy they withdraw when he advances; harass him when he stops; strike him when he is weary; pursue him when he withdraws.'⁷³

Although written to meet the demands of rural revolutionary warfare, Mao's observations on the tactical art of irregular warfare have gained a perennial quality, regardless of the location, ideology or strategy of the insurgent. So too has his belief

⁷² Taber, *The War of the Flea*, p.29.

⁷³ Mao Zedong, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (trans. Samuel B Griffith II) (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1978 [1937]), p.43.

in the political omnipotence surrounding a military insurgency, castigating those who lose sight of ‘the political goal and the political effects of guerrilla action.’⁷⁴ It is not just for the counter-insurgent that Clausewitzian truisms regarding war and politics ring true. In light of this, it is important to remember that Mao conceived of guerrilla warfare as a ‘strategic auxiliary to orthodox operations’ and not as an exclusive mode of warfare in its own right.⁷⁵ This caveat in the application of revolutionary insurgency can help explain why many Maoist ‘peoples’ wars’, including that facing the British in Malaya, have failed due to a fundamental misapplication of Mao’s doctrine. Insurgency was never intended to be the only way to achieve strategic goals.

Like Mao, Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara also wrote on the application of guerrilla warfare, yet in contrast to his Chinese contemporary, Guevara did not perceive insurgency as supplementary to conventional warfare, but as a prelude to it.⁷⁶ Regardless of differences in perception of the utility of irregular warfare, what unites Mao and Guevara’s work is an underlying message that if insurgent groups wish to fulfil their political goals then a military strategy comprising an element of irregular warfare, which in itself is constitutive of a tactical repertoire that includes ambush, harassment, and agility, must be implemented.

These two prominent insurgent strategists promulgated a way of irregular warfare that instigated the era of ‘classical’ counter-insurgency that was analysed above. The

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.41.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.52.

⁷⁶ Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969 [1961]), pp.16-18.

dissemination of their thoughts amongst revolutionary left-wing circles gave rise to the domination of insurgent doctrine by a rurally inspired and peasant-led military strategy. However, the increasing urbanisation of developing countries in the mid-twentieth century ensured that insurgent strategy had to move away from Maoist ideals of a protracted ‘peoples’ war’ and Guevara’s discredited rural ‘foco’ theory of revolutionary growth, and adapt to the new opportunities offered by urban conflict and the application of terrorism tactics. Whereas, for example, the Malayan Races Liberation Army, blinded by their misguided adherence to Maoist strategy, failed to launch a two-pronged war by attacking rural and urban targets simultaneously, the National Liberation Front (NLF) in Yemen took full advantage of a concentrated, therefore vulnerable, British military presence in the strategically vital port town of Aden by initiating acts of urban terrorism in conjunction with operations in the Radfan mountains and the Yemeni desert.

These two examples, however, do raise the important point regarding the impact of the conflict environment on the appropriate tactical response. Rural terrain and urban areas offer differing opportunities and hindrances for both sides in irregular warfare, in terms of an insurgent’s ability to ‘hit and run’ and the security force’s mobility and offensive capacity. Rural campaigns, as launched by the jungle-bound MRLA in Malaya or the forest-focussed campaign of the Mau Mau in Kenya, allow insurgent groups a natural habitat in which to hide, plan attacks, and receive effective shelter from aerial bombardment. The effects of such a conflict environment directly impacts upon the strategic feasibility of the insurgent’s campaign particularly in terms of logistical supplies and intelligence, as it forces the group to become self-sufficient or else coerce local rural communities into providing food and information.

The natural camouflage and the vast spaces offered by a rural setting grants an insurgent group a degree of ready-made invisibility, therefore nullifying the security forces use of large sweeps through sizeable areas of jungle or forest – the counter-insurgency equivalent of searching for a needle in a haystack. Urban insurgencies offer a different form of concealment, one that ensures that indiscriminate or overt firepower cannot feasibly be employed by counter-insurgent forces. The ability to merge into the wider population provides excellent cover for the insurgents, compelling the security forces to adopt small scale ‘cordon and search’ operations. This, however, brings with it a whole new set of dangers for military and police personnel, as the almost daily attacks in Iraq demonstrated, because they make themselves static targets at checkpoints or on patrol through the streets for snipers, suicide attacks, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The conflict environment, therefore, plays a key role in dictating the tactical options available to an insurgent group and, particularly in the case of urban insurgencies where the density of ‘occupier’ or ‘oppressor’ military and political personnel provides for ‘target rich’ surroundings, can also have a bearing on the actual strategic outcome.

Certain other factors must also be taken into account when analysing the strategy of an insurgency. Firstly, the strategy must invariably be placed in a temporal context. Just as counter-insurgents cannot rely on any pre-conceived strategic notions of a quick victory, neither too can an insurgents. In irregular warfare longevity should permeate strategic thinking on both sides, but for different reasons. As Charles Townshend succinctly states: ‘In conventional warfare time is expensive to

governments; in irregular war it is cheap to their opponents.⁷⁷ Despite the demise of Maoist rural uprisings, the protracted nature of insurgencies still remains the same. As the conflict in Iraq unfolds it is still clear to see how a counter-insurgent state psychologically and logistically prepares itself for the long haul, whereas the psyche of the insurgent opposition, not to mention its seemingly endless recruitment cycle, sets the conflict up for an intractable and uncomfortable stalemate. Victory has always been a nebulous phrase in counter-insurgency. Political face-saving and military pride has seen to that. It is Henry Kissinger who perhaps best summed up this conundrum during the Vietnam War: 'The insurgent wins if he does not lose. The counterinsurgent loses if he does not win.'⁷⁸ This analysis may be stark but encapsulates the way in which the emphasis on attaining all strategic goals lies with the counter-insurgent to a far greater degree than it does with insurgents. Continued, albeit sporadic, activity at the tactical level will still perpetuate a perception that the wider strategic struggle survives.

One key element necessary in propagating an insurgency, as the case studies will demonstrate through historical experience, is that the insurgents do not meet the counter-insurgents on the latter's terms. Asymmetric conflict does not require David to meet Goliath on the battlefield, but for David to find innovative and elusive ways to nullify Goliath's advantages of size and strength without direct confrontation. Often, by protracting the conflict militarily, an insurgent group can weaken the political resolve of the counter-insurgent nation and, without having won a major military battle, ensure a withdrawal of occupying forces due to a collapsed political

⁷⁷ Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars*, p.14.

⁷⁸ Henry Kissinger, 'The Vietnam Negotiations', *Foreign Affairs* (January 1969), pp.211-234.

consensus given the costly longevity of the conflict.⁷⁹ Such occurrences were evident in the British withdrawal from Aden in 1967 and, most notoriously, the ignominious American retreat from Vietnam during the mid-1970s. Indeed, destroying the political will of the counter-insurgent state is often the only recourse to strategic ‘victory’ open to insurgent groups in the face of overwhelming firepower and military technology. This is certainly an element in play in the campaign in Iraq, where Islamist insurgents play upon American and British unpopularity to a wider audience. The insurgents operating in Iraq today are still bound by some of the strategic and tactical truisms alluded to above, yet strategic notions of a Maoist revolt in the ‘classical’ insurgent form are not applicable to this contemporary pan-national, technologically adept movement. For this reason, it is worth analysing the modern strategic implications of Islamist insurgency in more depth.

The contemporary global Islamist insurgency, networked through cells with its vestiges of technological and operational innovation, has changed perceptions of counter-insurgency best practice. With Iraq as its current hub, the insurgency is one where traditional territorial concepts of conflict are insufficient. As Stephen Sloan notes: ‘(T)he object is not the use of terrorism as one aspect of a guerrilla war to seize state power, but... terrorism as a means of fundamentally transforming entire regions.’⁸⁰ By capitalising on technological and communication innovations, such as the internet, Islamist insurgents have been able to publicise and recruit for their cause on an unprecedented scale, turning the prized inventions of the post-industrial, high-

⁷⁹ Andrew Mack, ‘Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars’, *World Politics*, Vol.27 No.2 (January 1975), p.176.

⁸⁰ Stephen Sloan, ‘Responding to the Threat’, in Robert Bunker (ed), *Networks, Terrorism and Global Insurgency* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p.xxiii.

tech West against itself. In this sense, the insurgent maxim of playing to an enemy's disadvantages has been aggrandised like never before. Now cell-based groups, small and simply structured, can capitalise on the gaping asymmetry of the conflict by exposing the West's reliance on technology, its complex bureaucratic web, and its sacrosanct economic infrastructure. The vastness of cyberspace has granted insurgent groups the freedom and knowledge to securely and secretly plan and launch operations. Such technological innovations have ensured the decentralisation of insurgent operational control from a notional 'leadership' to individual cells within the structure. Although cell-based insurgencies have existed in the past, such is the quasi-autonomy of Islamist cells granted by the simplicity of long-distance communication and the fundamentally non-territorial nature of their insurgency, that complex plans of mass terrorism can be formulated and disseminated with relative ease. Long gone are the days when naive insurgents thought, as T.E. Lawrence recounted, 'weapons destructive in proportion to their noise.'⁸¹ We live in more complex times, where insurgencies have attained a sophisticated level of tactical savvy in order to attain strategic goals. This is the darker side of globalisation.

Indigenous Support

The beating heart of an insurgency is the support received from elements of the indigenous population. Passive and active internal assistance sustains the political message of the insurgency as well as aiding the military side of the campaign by

⁸¹ Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, p.91.

establishing intelligence networks and building covert supply chains. Quite simply, insurgencies instigated in the name of ‘the people’ cannot perpetuate their struggle if ‘the people’ are at best apathetic, at worst out-right opposed to the insurgent cause. Key to this is the religious, ethnic and racial cleavages that divide a population. Grievances harboured by societal segments can quickly translate into sympathy or even activity for the insurgency, especially from disadvantaged, discriminated or minority sections of the demographic. However, this is no guarantee for garnering support for an insurgency tacitly or explicitly associated with a particular grouping in society. The almost exclusive ethnic Chinese membership of the Malayan Communist Party did not translate into pan-Chinese Malay support for the uprising as it proved to be an essentially ideological and not ethnic insurgency, despite the discrimination the Chinese Malay population suffered at the hands of British colonial rule. The Mau Mau in Kenya attempted to ignite a rebellion within the widely disadvantaged Kikuyu tribe but was undermined by the mystical and atavistic image their insurgency exuded. In the Irish case, the IRA played heavily on British discrimination against the Catholic community in Ulster as a means of provocation. In such circumstances it is imperative that the counter-insurgent state redouble its political overtures to minority populations susceptible to the insurgent message, in order to stem the broad societal support for the insurgency, and that the military maintain an emphasis on ‘hearts and minds’ so as not to aggravate the minority population with an ethnic or religious affinity to the insurgency.

Popular support holds a vital key to success for the insurgent and counter-insurgent alike. Dealing with swathes of a population who passively support the insurgency can hinder counter-insurgency operations as communities become reluctant to

divulge any information on insurgent activity in their area. Passive popular support gifts insurgents a wall of silence that can shelter them from intelligence leaks. However, it is mainly upon active popular support that insurgents rely for explicit help, including arms resupply, intelligence, concealment and medical attention. There are certain perennial factors that appear to motivate elements of the population to support an insurgency. As Robert Thompson noted in the wake of his experiences in Malaya and Vietnam, three primary dynamics impinged on the domestic population vis-à-vis the insurgency: 'nationalism and national politics, religion and customs, material well-being and progress.'⁸² Over half a century after these observations were first made, these same criteria can still be applied to contemporary counter-insurgency. Not only do populations respond to affects on their own material interests (look at the widespread discontent at the American-led coalition's struggle to reinstate and maintain the Iraqi electricity and water supply), but also they rally around corresponding religious militias in the face of opposing faction belligerence (hence interpretations that Iraq is now gripped by a *de facto* civil war between Sunni and Shi'te) as well as rounding against the common enemy, the occupying coalition, in the name of Iraqi national pride. Iraq serves as a crucial reminder that an insurgency feeds off the support it can find in the population. Not only does it provide an ideational purpose in perpetuating the political dynamism and fervour of the insurgency, but also a material purpose as militias and gangs build supply and intelligence networks amongst the people that they claim to defend and protect. Yet it is not just inward that we must look to understand the true extent of insurgent support. We must turn our attention to exogenous support in addition to endogenous sustenance.

⁸² Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, p.63.

External Support

Rarely can an insurgency survive and thrive purely on the resources found within the boundaries of one particular state. The external provision of additional financing, logistical support, and willing recruits to the insurgent cause is therefore critical if an insurgent movement wishes to fulfil its strategic goals and achieve a level of tactical effectiveness. External support becomes even more important if the insurgent group has failed to find a substantive foothold of support within the indigenous population. Bard O'Neill's typology of variations of external assistance is extremely useful in allowing us to perceive the levels and sort of support on offer. He distinguishes between *moral* support (public statements of solidarity from other states or groups, such as those emanating from the powerful Irish-American lobby in the US during the 'Troubles' in support of the republican cause); *political* support (active manoeuvring on behalf of the insurgents on the diplomatic stage, which was a particular version of support provided by the Soviet Union to most communist-inspired insurgencies during the Cold War⁸³); *material* support (the provision of military, financial or logistical supplies, for example the overt Egyptian assistance to the National Liberation Front (NLF) insurgents fighting the British in South Arabia and Aden); and *sanctuary* (the use of cross-border training facilities, hideouts and

⁸³ For analysis of Soviet surrogacy of certain Third World insurgent movements see Kanet, 'The Superpower Quest for Empire', and Richard Shultz, 'The Role of External Forces in Third World Conflict', *Comparative Strategy*, Vol.4 No.2 (1983), pp.79-111.

operational bases, as Iran has been accused of providing for Iraqi-based jihadists in order to weaken their neighbour, attain regional dominance and undermine the US).⁸⁴

The receipt of outside help is often the only way that an insurgent group can hope to reduce the disparity of firepower and add to their tactical effectiveness. As Jeffrey Record rightly points out: '(E)xternal assistance is no guarantee of insurgent success, but there are few if any examples of unassisted insurgent victories against determined and resourceful governments.'⁸⁵ Outside support therefore becomes both a vital facilitator of success for insurgent groups, as well as a focus for the counter-insurgent authorities who should aim to strangle supplies and minimise the impact of exogenous supplies through tight border control. Jeffrey Record is also astute in pointing out the trend within the literature on insurgency and asymmetric warfare to assume that the 'weak' can beat the 'strong' by accounting for the superiority of 'such intangibles as political will and strategy.'⁸⁶ Although such factors retain a substantial degree of importance, material aspects must rank alongside ideational ones when analysing an insurgent group's ability to inflict military and political defeat upon the counter-insurgent authorities. The role of external assistance, in terms of arms, money and equipment can go a long way in accounting for the British defeat of the MRLA in Malaya, who lacked any help from outside its borders and, in contrast, the NLF's victory of military and political attrition over the British in South

⁸⁴ O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism*, pp.114-117.

⁸⁵ Jeffrey Record, 'External Assistance: Enable of Insurgent Success', *Parameters*, Vol.36 No.3 (Autumn 2006), p.36.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.36. For an argument espousing the idea that insurgent 'victory' in insurgencies is down to an asymmetry of interests in the conflict vis-à-vis the counter-insurgent state see Mack, 'Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars', pp.175-200. For a contrasting argument, that places responsibility for insurgent success at the door of the failure of the 'strong' state to adopt the right strategic approach in light of the conflict asymmetry, see Ivan Arreguin-Toft, 'How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict', *International Security*, Vol.26 No.1 (2001) pp.93-128.

Arabia given the constant stream of Egyptian-provided, Soviet-made weaponry, as well as military advisors and high numbers of regular troops to augment the anti-royalist, anti-British military presence in the region. When we take into account the externally supported insurgents in southern Iraq and in southern Yemen, history has demonstrated that the British have displayed an inability to adequately suppress insurgencies that are in receipt of sizeable outside support.

External assistance has also helped turn the tide in the counter-insurgency experiences of other nations, notably the American frustration at Soviet and Chinese assistance for the Viet Cong insurgents and the North Vietnamese regular army, which invariably helped prolong the military capabilities of the insurgent forces and weaken American military and political resolve, as well as the Soviet military impotence rendered by the American supply of Stinger surface-to-air missiles to the mujahidin resistance in Afghanistan in 1985. External assistance, or the absence thereof, must be seen as a factor ranking alongside strategy, organisational structure and functionality, and indigenous support as the sub-parts contributing to a holistic analysis of the operational effectiveness of an insurgent group, which in itself plays a large role in determining the outcome of any such conflict.

The Third Dimension: International Context

International and Regional Pressures

No counter-insurgency campaign takes place in isolation, hermitically sealed from international scrutiny or the interests of other states. Such conflicts will arouse the suspicions or solidarity of numerous nations who perceive an interest in the outcome of the campaign. As explained earlier, the external support received by insurgent groups can be critical in enabling their uprising to succeed and sets the tone for the achievement of their strategic goals. In a similar vein, it is important that the counter-insurgent state receive favourable international consensus (or failing that, widespread apathy will suffice) in order to ground the strategy in international moral and legal legitimacy. There are a number of other parties who do not have a direct hand in the conflict whose influence is still vital to the outcome. Firstly, the tacit or explicit support of the superpowers is always crucial. For Britain after World War Two, as their global power waned dramatically in the new nuclear era, this meant gaining American backing for counter-insurgency operations. As the US became the self-styled leader of the post-war West and the nuclear protector of democratic countries at the beginning of the new bipolar age, it gathered increasing importance for the UK to receive the backing of the US for military deployments as the US-UK 'special relationship' was recast.⁸⁷ This held several implications, especially for the conduct of counter-insurgency operations – a lens through which the 'special relationship' has been historically ignored. American foreign policy rhetoric has consistently contained an anti-colonial element to it for obvious historical reasons. Therefore it became imperative that Britain not depict the small wars being fought around the globe as the last vestiges of a fading power clinging on to its Empire.

⁸⁷ Noteworthy examples from the extensive pool of literature on the US-UK 'special relationship' include, John Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations, 1939-84: The Special Relationship* (London: Macmillan, 1994), and Alex Danchev, 'The Cold War "Special Relationship" Revisited', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol.17 No.3 (2006), pp.579-95.

Britain came out of World War Two a different power to which it had entered it. The international order had altered and the ‘winds of change’ were blowing through the British Empire. Decolonisation had manifested itself as a reality by the late 1940s as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Burma achieved independence. Yet the British were keen to engineer colonial independence along their own lines and consequently launched belligerent responses to armed insurgencies whose goals differed from the acceptable model of a post-colonial, pro-British government. However, to depict these conflicts as essentially ‘imperial’ would be to overlook the omnipresence of the wider ideological struggle that encompassed these conflicts: the Cold War.⁸⁸ Insurgencies and small wars that contained elements of the broader Cold War ideological struggle became the *de facto* crucible in which the East v. West conflict played out. They became conduits for the major superpowers to channel their influence in efforts to undermine their rival, draining their economic resources, pinning down military resources, and adding to social and political unrest on the domestic front.⁸⁹ Even given the broadly anti-colonial nature of many insurgencies Britain fought in the post-war era, such was the pervasiveness of the ideological division of the world order that it became hard to resist, in Bard O’Neill’s term, ‘the internationalisation of insurgencies.’⁹⁰ This is a trend that has grown exponentially in line with the growth of modern media coverage of international events.

⁸⁸ Mark Berger, ‘The Real Cold War Was Hot: The Global Struggle for the Third World’, *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.23 No.1 (February 2008), p.113.

⁸⁹ Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the resultant access to hitherto unseen archival material, there has been a historiographical shift in Cold War studies towards internationalising the conflict, placing a greater emphasis on conflict in the Third World. For the best example of such a work see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁹⁰ O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism*, p.5.

Despite the disparity of insurgent causes that Britain faced, it was impossible to escape the influence of wider US-Soviet-Sino conflict. British conviction that the Malayan Communist Party uprising in 1948 was a Soviet-inspired conspiracy added to the wider international implications of the insurgency. The regional element also played a factor given the creation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, establishing a communist power that possessed the ability to influence regional and global events. Thus the Malayan Emergency was able to feed into wider American fears of a South-East Asian 'domino theory'.

The Suez crisis of 1956 ensured tighter scrutiny of British foreign policy actions. The international condemnation of the joint British, French and Israeli action in Egypt undermined American support for British military deployments. The pressure came to bear on the British military in Yemen in the 1960s as the Americans placed diplomatic pressure on Whitehall to curtail its imperial ambitions, despite the overt Soviet sponsorship of the Egyptian-backed insurgents. The US clearly opposed British regional influence in the Cold War, yet they did not wish to strengthen the hand of communism, causing a dichotomy between their anti-colonial rhetoric and their staunch support for anti-communist operations. However, it must be concluded, as William Roger Louis has pointed out, that: 'American anti-colonialism was always reconciled with the needs of security... The crusade against communism and the defence requirements of the 'free world' came first.'⁹¹ To harden such a viewpoint we can observe the American abstention from ratifying the United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples in

⁹¹ William Roger Louis, 'American Anti-Colonialism and the Dissolution of the British Empire', *International Affairs*, Vol.61 No.3 (Summer 1985), p.397 and pp.411-12.

1960 as further evidence of their desire to leave themselves the strategic space to assess each colonial case on its merits – in other words, to assess the possibility of a communist take-over in the post-colonial vacuum.⁹²

The American's clearly held romantic notions of the republican struggle in Northern Ireland and did exert pressure over British conduct of operations in the province. It was therefore little wonder that an American envoy, Senator George Mitchell, was selected to marshal the peace process in the 1990s. This follows a pattern of American reactions to British counter-insurgency operations that has rested on a blend of material and ideational factors, including the political dividend they may reap in light of British success (i.e. communism stymied in South-East Asia without direct American military involvement); the perceived interference of another power in a region they are seeking to bring within their own sphere of influence for ideological and economic reasons (i.e. the Middle East); and the channelling of opinion of powerful and vocal diasporas on the international stage (i.e. the Irish-American lobby.)

The importance of material and ideational factors is still at play in contemporary counter-insurgency operations in Iraq. However, the War on Terror has witnessed the first deployment of British troops to a counter-insurgency conflict as junior coalition partners, where their influence is mainly operational rather than strategic. This says as much about the role of Britain as a world power as it does about the balance of the 'special relationship'. The Americans still bear an influence on British counter-

⁹² Rupert Emerson, 'Colonialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.4 No.1 (January 1969), p.5.

insurgency operations, but currently with more strategic control than ever before. The influences of other states are thus a vital component in assessing the evolution of British counter-insurgency, be it in a Cold War, domestic, or post-9/11 context. Globalisation has come to bear on this particular form of warfare. The international element therefore provides the third and final constitutive element of the 'tri-partite model', allowing our understanding of British counter-insurgency conflicts to become multi-dimensional in effectively explaining the inability to meet strategic goals.

This, therefore, is the analytical foundation of the thesis, the basis of the critical evaluation of the case studies. It is multi-dimensional and is intended to provide a comprehensive and detailed explanation and understanding of British counter-insurgency over the last half a century and allow for a re-interpretation of British 'success' in counter-insurgency. Yet the model remains a straw man unless given bones and muscle via the application of historical and contemporary examples. It is to be stood up against five case studies, spanning the post-World War Two years, when British counter-insurgency found itself widely enacted. The case studies appear chronologically, allowing us to evaluate the developments and consistencies in the British approach to counter-insurgency – an evolution marked by slow tactical learning and a slow burning strategy.

CHAPTER 2: *Methodology*

This thesis bridges the divide between international relations and international history. As such, it utilises a number of methodological tools as a means of harnessing empirical information and securing a meaningful mode of presenting the research findings. In essence, the reflexive use of primary archival documents, combined with a critical appraisal of arguments housed in the secondary literature, are analysed within a framework of a comparative, case study-based approach.

Comparative Case Studies: A Methodological Approach

The utilisation of the comparative method in international relations research shares a longevity with the discipline itself. Forming a central plank in the approach to political research, comparison is not necessarily a method of measurement in a purely positivist sense, but is a tool that be employed to discover the empirical relationship between two or more political variables.

Todd Landman identifies four main reasons for utilising a comparative approach: contextual description; classification and ‘typologizing’; hypothesis-testing and theory-building; and prediction.¹ It is firmly within the first of these justifications that this thesis is located. The comparative nature of the case studies is intended to offer an empirically

¹ Todd Landman, *Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics: An Introduction* (3rd edition) (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p.4.

rich description of events in order to contextualise the relative ‘success’ of British counter-insurgency campaigns over the last sixty years. Despite harnessing a meta-narrative pertaining to notions of the British being ‘slow learners’ and ‘slow burners’ in the realm of counter-insurgency, it is not proposed to test hypotheses or build theory in a positivist sense, nor attempt to posit predictions as to the possible outcomes of future campaigns. Instead, a comparative methodology is utilised here as a means by which to describe the British counter-insurgency experience across continents, across the last half century.

Landman goes on to acknowledge four vital components of any form of comparative research, including that of contextual description: cases; units of analysis; variables; and observations. By way of explanation, cases are the places or phenomena that are the basis of the analysis. Units of analysis are the ‘objects in which a scholar collects data.’ Variables are ‘those concepts whose value changes over a given set of units’, whilst observations are ‘the values of the variables for each unit.’² In direct relation to this thesis, the Tri-Partite Model encompasses these components to provide a comprehensive means of comparative analysis. The case studies selected are the Malayan Emergency (1948-60); the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya (1952-60); the insurgency in Aden and South Arabia (1962-67); the first decade of the Northern Ireland ‘Troubles’ (1969-79); and an evaluation of the recent British counter-insurgency efforts in southern Iraq (2003-09). The units of analysis are the distinct dimensions of counter-insurgent; insurgent; and international influence. The variables housed across these units include counter-

² Ibid, p.18.

insurgent political, military and intelligence approaches; insurgent organisation, strategy and tactics, and levels of internal and external support; and the intensity of global political opinion or intervention in the conflict. The primary observations drawn from the value of these variables is that the political management and military execution of counter-insurgency by the British throughout the cases from the last sixty years has revealed a slow lesson learning mentality and the disorganised implementation of a slow burning strategy, all of which has been undertaken, up until Iraq, against deficient insurgent opponents. Holistically, therefore, this provides a macro-level analysis of the evolution of the British approach to counter-insurgency between 1948 and 2009.

Comparative politics has emerged in the last half century as a sub-field of international relations (IR) in its own right, with its own peer-reviewed journals and body of scholarly literature, to the extent to which it can be interpreted as ‘intellectually autonomous’ of other branches of IR.³ However, it is its utility as a methodological approach that holds relevance to both the structure and the epistemological premise of this thesis. As counter-insurgency regains its status as the *modus operandi* of Western militaries, the need to critically reassess the last sixty years worth of the British counter-insurgency experience becomes premised on the need for a comparative case study based approach.

Arend Lijphart hits the methodological nail on the head when he states that: ‘the principal problems facing the comparative method can be succinctly stated as: many

³ James A. Caporaso, ‘Across the Great Divide: Integrating Comparative and International Politics’, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.40. No.1 (1997), p.564.

variables, small number of cases.’⁴ In short, there is a correlation between the quantity of variables or cases and the quality of effective comparative analysis. In an attempt to alleviate this perennial methodological problem, the structure proposed in the ‘Tripartite Model’ goes some way towards regulating the most prominent and reoccurring variables in British counter-insurgency based on historical analysis (such as the interconnectivity between military, political and intelligence actors) and by applying this uniform model across all case studies. This permits a greater opportunity to describe the empirical relationships between these variables across time and space, enabling a critical analysis of perceived British ‘success’ in counter-insurgency campaigns.

Yet any comparative study must be aware of what Richard Rose has labelled its own ‘bounded variability,’⁵ mutually rejecting the extremes of assuming universalism and the limits of particularism. What is clear is that a comparative trade-off must occur where the depth and breadth of the analysis is sufficiently bridged in order to acquire adequate mid-range analysis. For this reason, this thesis employs five case studies in order to describe how the British approach to counter-insurgency has evolved in the post-World War Two era – a manageable mid-range number of cases that take in a broad temporal period and geographical variance. Furthermore, a comparative study must also be wary of not engaging in the methodological misdemeanours of ‘conceptual travelling’ (comparing events separated by too much time or incongruence) or ‘conceptual stretching’ (applying cases to fit circumstances). The cases selected represent a bridge

⁴ Arend Lijphart, ‘Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol.65 No.3 (1976), p.685.

⁵ Richard Rose, ‘Comparing Forms of Comparative Analysis’, *Political Studies*, Vol.39 No.3 (1991), p.447.

over the potential travails of such travelling or stretching by forming a linear chronology of British counter-insurgency campaigns with no distinct disjunctions across time, and the Tri-partite Model attempts to avoid deductive theorising regarding preconceived notions of what the historical cases tell us about the contemporary. It also attempts to circumnavigate the problem of case selection bias. The temptation to deductively select cases that will neatly fit a preconceived hypothesis will inevitably produce flawed research. So how can the case selection for this thesis be justified?

The cases were chosen for several reasons. Firstly, the colonial examples represent the most significant turning points in British counter-insurgency given their importance to both British and wider international military and political developments. The case studies selected stand out as the most noteworthy campaigns that are demonstrative of a considerable counter-insurgency deployment, each having a sizeable impact upon the way in which the British military theorised and practiced irregular warfare. Secondly, they offer a well-spread temporal and regional mix. Every decade of the post-war era is covered by at least one case study (hence the omission of the Cyprus Emergency, 1955-59, as Malaya and Kenya provide ample analysis of 1950s counter-insurgency for the purposes of this thesis), whilst the five cases are drawn from distinct and varied parts of the world (hence the omission of the limited British counter-insurgency deployment to Oman in the late 1970s – Aden provides a far more detailed and wider example of British counter-insurgency in the Gulf region). The case studies were not picked to justify the inclusion of certain factors within the model. Indeed, the model is not rigid and holds no pre-conceived notions of which elements are superior to others. It is an

inter-active model constitutive of consistently applied variables that can help explain why one factor impacted upon the eventual outcome in one case study, yet played a relatively minor role in another. Yet, holistically, certain elements of the model, emphasised at different points across the case studies, present a picture of a regularly inert and inept British response.

The question of internal and external validity is of paramount importance with regard to a comparative study. Internal validity relates to the cases that are under scrutiny – in other words, are the variables viable? External validity refers to the generalisability of the findings in terms of its applicability to other cases. The validity of the comparisons within this thesis are guaranteed by firstly the chronological and congruent nature of the cases selected and secondly by the potential ability to apply the Tri-Partite Model across other national counter-insurgency experiences, to the American, French or Portuguese cases for example. The employment of a multiple case study-based approach allows for a ‘controlled comparison’ to be conducted, enabling the study to identify levels of equivalence between variables (in this case, for example, the relationship between the level of external funding for an insurgency and the success of the counter-insurgency in fulfilling its strategic goals), and to conduct a system of ‘process tracing’ whereby analysis of the case studies allows us to track the progression by which conditions produce outcomes (again in this case, how, for example, did the British army come to

conduct its counter-insurgency campaign in southern Iraq the way it did as a result of its historical experiences?).⁶

One of the primary advantages of utilising case studies as a research tool is that they encompass an array of strategies on the methodological spectrum, covering issues regarding research design and empirical information collection, dissemination and analysis. Robert Yin has argued that case studies are best applied ‘when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.’⁷ Arguably the utility of case studies in the context of this thesis is justified under Yin’s criteria as it takes the recent British conduct of counter-insurgency operations in southern Iraq as the culminating point of sixty years of counter-insurgency learning, as revealed through asking the ‘how’ and ‘why’ research questions of: how did the British come to conduct their counter-insurgency operations as they have done?; and why has Britain been traditionally assumed to be competent or ‘successful’ at such operations?

Today is Yesterday Tomorrow: The Relationship Between History and IR

International Relations research is often classified as contributing an ‘explanation’ or an ‘understanding’ of events, phenomena or structures. Whereas ‘explaining’ often couches

⁶ Steven van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp.56-64.

⁷ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (3rd ed), (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1996), p.1.

analysis in positivist law-like hypotheses designed to find causal links, research that proffers an ‘understanding’ of a particular facet of International Relations, as Ngaire Woods argues, delves ‘into history not as a bank of information which might falsify a theory, but as a narrative which permits a greater appreciation of the origins, evolution and consequences of an event.’⁸ It is in this latter vein that this thesis presents an understanding of British counter-insurgency as being haphazardly implemented and lacking the success that has traditionally been bestowed upon it. It will be the utilisation of historical case studies, woven through the Tri-partite Model framework, which will provide the core foundation of the research.

It is clear that this thesis transcends the boundary between international relations and international history. These two disciplines have a close relationship, although not necessarily a smooth one.⁹ Indeed, they can be considered as ‘brothers under the skin’.¹⁰ Methodologically, the two disciplines are similar, with both facilitating the use of documents, interviews (for the contemporary historian), and archival work. However, the real deviation is on an epistemological level, where the role of ‘facts’ and their interpretation produces differences over the employment of theory. As E.H. Carr asserted, any contemporary attempt to investigate the past ‘consciously or unconsciously reflects our own position in time, and forms part of our answer to the broader question

⁸ Ngaire Woods, ‘The Uses of Theory in the Study of International Relations’, in Ngaire Woods (ed), *Explaining International Relations Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.11.

⁹ Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, ‘International History and International Relations Theory: A Dialogue Beyond the Cold War’, *International Affairs*, Vol.76 No.4 (2000), p.741.

¹⁰ Stephen H. Haber, David M. Kennedy and Stephen D. Krasner, ‘Brothers Under the Skin: Diplomatic History and International Relations’, *International Security*, Vol.22 No.1 (Summer 1997), pp.34-43.

what view we take of the society in which we live.’¹¹ In other words, we project our modern condition, our current existence, retrospectively in a pursuit of understanding, rendering us unable to truly disaggregate the present from the past. Indeed, it has been the quagmire arising from the invasion of Iraq in 2003 that has triggered a parenthetic clamour to revisit historical examples of counter-insurgency as a means of helping interpret the current crisis, of aiding an appreciation of the contemporary tactical and strategic direction, and of placing British political and military conduct in context. Historical counter-insurgency is now relevant again as a belated process of asymmetric lesson-learning unfolds. Yet as Carr points out, the contemporary need to understand elements of the past is not only catalysed by the pressing need to untangle current complexities. But with this comes a concomitant impermanence with which the past is rendered with utility. Once the coalition has withdrawn from Iraq and the contemporaneous ‘broader questions’ that Carr found inevitable have been settled, what then becomes the role of history? There is a danger that historical analysis becomes merely a tool to be utilised only to help retrospectively justify or denigrate an existing policy decision. The past therefore becomes evidence offered by the defence or prosecution in the intellectual trial of contemporary international relations.¹² This thesis is therefore premised as a bulwark to this fleeting and inexpedient use of history by aiming to promote, in E.H.Carr’s words, ‘a profounder understanding of both past and present through the interrelation between them.’¹³ Consequently, this thesis presents itself essentially as a work of international history that casts light on contemporary strategic studies.

¹¹ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (2nd ed) (London: Penguin, 1987), p.8.

¹² Woods, ‘The Uses of Theory’, p.19.

¹³ Carr, *What is History*, p.68.

How then are the disciplines of history and international relations interrelated? To crudely characterise, it can be said that for the historian, IR scholars are guilty of frequently abusing history to uphold theories, hypotheses or policy recommendations; for the IR scholar, historians are largely devoid of theoretical judgement and are caught in a cycle of description not explanation.¹⁴ John Lewis Gaddis borrows from Sigmund Freud the phrase ‘narcissism of minor differences’ to explain the relationship between the two disciplines, because for Gaddis: ‘Both disciplines fall squarely within the spectrum of “non-replicable” sciences. Both trace processes over time. Both employ imagination. Both use counter-factual reasoning.’¹⁵ To this list, Geoffrey Roberts would also add that both history and IR are increasingly narrative in their content.¹⁶ Yet for Gaddis the primary difference that has generated so much narcissism in both camps lies in the use of history for the purposes of prediction and policy relevance – tasks that political scientists enthusiastically indulge and ones that historians shy from ‘like vampires confronted with crosses.’¹⁷ However, the intellectual barriers that may have enforced the segregation of history and IR in the past have been surmounted in the past two decades to the extent that, in Zara Steiner’s words, academia can no longer ignore the presence of contemporary historians or historically-oriented IR scholars who ‘find or

¹⁴ Jack Levy, ‘Too Important to Leave to the Other: History and Political Science in Their Study of International Relations’, *International Security*, Vol.22 No.1 (Summer 1997), p.22.

¹⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, ‘History, Theory and Common Ground’, *International Security*, Vol.22 No.1 (Summer 1997), p.84.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Roberts, ‘History, Theory and the Narrative Turn in IR’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol.32 No.4 (October 2006), pp.703-714.

¹⁷ Gaddis, ‘History, Theory and Common Ground’, p.84. For a strong advocacy of bridging the divide, not only between history and international relations but between scholarly research and policy advice too, see Alexander L. George, ‘Knowledge for Statecraft: The Challenge for Political Science and History’, *International Security*, Vol.22 No.1 (Summer 1997), pp.44-52.

create patterns that illuminate the past and open up ways to see the present and the future.’¹⁸ Indeed, historians should relish the task of informing policy-makers, whose ransacking of history to produce decisions via the use of analogical reasoning has done much ensure that contemporary political decision-making (or indeed military strategy-making) is diverted from acknowledging prescient lessons of the past. History, in particular military history, is not something merely found in a dusty archive. It should be something actively involved in the formulation of contemporary security decision-making in order to avoid what Gary Sheffield has labelled the ‘prostitution of scholarship’ by policy-makers.¹⁹

Despite the seeming *rapprochement* between IR and history there still remains a need to balance IR scholarship between the essentially ahistorical studies that display a poverty of historical consciousness and the works that promote a form of historicism, namely the search for positivist law-like trends in historical development. As Donald Puchala rightly points out, in IR there ‘are no privileged pathways to the truth. Instead, there are numerous avenues of enlightenment.’²⁰ History provides one of the most illuminating of these pathways. As Hidemi Suganami has argued, there is a need to bring history to bear upon IR ‘in order to deepen its critical reflections on its lines of enquiry, to improve its

¹⁸ Zara Steiner, ‘On Writing International History: Chaps, Maps and Much More’, *International Affairs*, Vol.73 No.3 (July 1997), p.545.

¹⁹ Gary Sheffield, ‘Military Past, Military Present, Military Future: The Usefulness of Military History’, *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 153 No.3 (2008), p.102.

²⁰ Donald Puchala, *Theory and History in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p.10.

use of historical material, and to guard against a misuse of history... (D)rawing a rigid demarcation line between IR and IH [International History] is senseless.’²¹

History’s traditional contribution to IR has been, in Dennis Kavanagh’s words, ‘more as a body of knowledge than as a set of methods.’²² However the utility of history to the study of IR expands further to the contextualisation of structural and agential behaviour; to raising the awareness of policy consequences via historical parallels; to compressing temporal and spatial dimensions in order to imaginatively create abstract investigation and comparison in the present; and presenting nuanced examples that caution against contemporaneous over-simplification, reductionism or generalisation. Indeed, one of the most overt aspects of historical methodology employed in this thesis is the avoidance of the social scientist’s predilection for separating dependent from independent variables and (as witnessed in the interconnected Tri-Partite Model) an embracing of an interpretation of the interdependence of all variables and an assumption of their interweaving influence through time. Resultant from this is John Lewis Gaddis’s observation that: ‘History is arguably the best method of enlarging experience in such a way as to command the widest possible consensus on what the significance of that experience might be.’²³ With such a body of counter-insurgency experience in the post-World War Two era, it is both necessary and illuminating to assess the current strategic and operational environment in which the British were functioning in Iraq by ruminating

²¹ Hidemi Suganami, ‘Narrative Explanation and International Relations: Back to Basics’, *Millennium*, Vol.37 No.2 (2008), pp.328-9.

²² Dennis Kavanagh, ‘Why Political Science Needs History’, *Political Studies*, Vol.39 No.3 (1991), p.480.

²³ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.9.

on what exactly the significance of such a body of historical experience, in Malaya, Kenya, Yemen, and Northern Ireland, might be.

Sources: Documents and Archives

This thesis utilises a range of methodological tools in order to construct an in-depth study. Archival sources have been retrieved, in order to gain a foundation of primary source knowledge on which to base the thesis. An extensive literature search produced an array of secondary documents that helped ground the research in existing historiographical and contemporary debate. The accumulative effect of this methodological approach has enabled this thesis to encapsulate the nature of debate about the evolution of British counter-insurgency and to enable a critical analysis of how this has been presented and interpreted in the existing secondary literature and primary documents by unpacking notions of perceived British competence at counter-insurgency.

Primary sources are important because they function as a tool to help reconstruct past lives, events and processes. They provide a first-hand insight into the decision-making process, often at the very highest level, and can be presented as the most accurate representation of events as is possible. However, questions over a document's

authenticity, credibility and reliability must be constantly raised by a researcher.²⁴ A mere acceptance of the documents contents does not lead to an analytically sound piece of research, meaning that a more interpretative method must be adopted in order to avoid what E.H. Carr labelled the ‘fetishism of documents.’²⁵ Documents are products that are not language neutral, that have a persuasive purpose, which must be placed within their wider temporal and institutional context.²⁶ This is particularly true of autobiographies, a primary source that this thesis has utilised in order to gather interpretations of eyewitness accounts of events. Memoirs of former prime ministers, foreign and defence secretaries ‘have been used a great deal by historians but have not been given a great deal of attention by social researchers,’²⁷ for reasons of reliability. There is a constant and underlying danger that autobiographies are produced with the express purpose of conveying an alternative history of events in order to better the authors’ image, however they are extremely useful in helping explain intent and motive.²⁸ Consequently, autobiographies have been utilised but with a high degree of bias awareness.

The historical nature of many of the case studies employed in this thesis places archival research at the heart of the study. Official government accounts of events, discussions at cabinet meetings, and even private memos are essential in building up a wider picture to assess the political attitudes and reasoning behind the conduct of counter-insurgency

²⁴ Keith MacDonald and Colin Tipton, ‘Using Documents’, in Nigel Gilbert (ed), *Researching Social Life* (London: Sage, 1993), pp.195-198.

²⁵ Carr, *What is History?*, p.16.

²⁶ For a comprehensive discussion on the use of documents see Chapter 5 ‘Working with Documents’ in Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History: A Guide to Method* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

²⁷ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods (2nd ed)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.381.

²⁸ Peter Catterall, ‘Autobiographies and Memoirs’, in Peter Catterall and Harriet Jones (ed), *Understanding Documents and Sources* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1994), p.33.

campaigns. The National Archives at Kew have been extensively used, in line with the thirty-year document release rule, to gather material on operations in Malaya, Kenya, South Yemen and for the first decade of the Northern Irish 'Troubles'. Inaccessibility and incomplete records are two of the most problematic aspects of a documentary research strategy. However, the increasing accessibility of hitherto secret government documents, particularly pertaining to military or intelligence operations, has been partially alleviated thanks to a series of government schemes in the past few decades, including the Open Government Initiative instigated in 1992, and most recently the 2005 Freedom of Information Act. Although the intelligence agencies are exempt from this new wave of archival transparency, the cross-tabulation of intelligence material is possible through discussion in other non-exempt government department material, especially the Foreign Office.²⁹

Yet practical problems have still arisen during the archival research for this thesis. Files pertaining to the first decade of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, for example, are rife with redactions given the on-going sensitivity towards building a lasting peace in the province. This archival equivalent of letting sleeping dogs lie thus creates significant barriers for a researcher attempting to assess British security policy in Ulster in the 1970s, despite the period now falling outside the standard 'thirty year rule.' If, as has already been observed, counter-insurgency is a form of warfare that is '100% political', then the control of releasing documents in relation to such campaigns is, in itself, a

²⁹ For detailed discussion see Len Scott, 'Sources and Methods in the Study of Intelligence: A British View', *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.22 No.2 (April 2007), pp.185-205; and Gill Bennett, 'Declassification and Release Policies of the UK's Intelligence Agencies', *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.17 No.1 (Spring 2002), pp.21-32.

highly politicised affair. Redactions at the National Archives relating to Britain's counter-insurgency campaigns thus leads the researcher into a Rumsfeldian vortex of pondering the content of archival 'known unknowns' (for example, Joint Intelligence Committee assessments on Northern Ireland) and, more crucially, the 'unknown unknowns' of events or discussions as yet unidentified. However, it is important to caution against regarding the content of archival documents as sacrosanct or somehow a 'true' or 'accurate' picture of events. The positionality of cabinet members and civil servants must not go unnoticed when analysing the reliability of a document, thus fostering within the researcher a critical eye for content reflexivity.

Additional issues arising from this thesis included the problem of source material for the contemporary case study of Iraq, for which there exists no such pool of primary, elite-level, material upon which the 'historical' case studies are founded. There was thus an inevitable methodological shift from the archive-based research of the first four case studies to reliance upon newspaper reporting of events on-the-ground in Basra and on decisions and discussions taking place in Whitehall. This use of first-hand reporting of events by journalists, whilst useful in plugging the gap left by the absence of unclassified Ministry of Defence documentation on the campaign, is of course utilised with the same critical caveats placed upon archival documents themselves, namely an awareness of author positionality, potential political agenda and bias.

What is clear is that in regard to archival documents there has been an overt use of elite accounts of events. Documents written by former prime ministers, cabinet members or civil servants ensure an elite interpretation of meetings, agreements and the entire decision-making process has become the norm. The major consequence of such an approach is a top-down bias within the research that privileges the accounts of the political and military elite above the interpretations of, for example, a newly-enlisted sapper patrolling the streets of Belfast, or an engineer constructing a New Village for relocated squatters on the jungle-fringes of Malaya.³⁰ This remains an unfortunate yet ultimately unavoidable methodological conundrum that reflects the elite level at which counter-insurgency strategy, both politically and militarily, is constructed. For this reason it is essential for archival researchers to be wary, as Caroline Kennedy-Pipe has observed, of ‘collapsing the state into the archives and thereby equating the “state” in a simplistic manner with the “bureaucracy”.’³¹ However, certain levels of analysis issues are compensated by the Tri-Partite Model’s premising of the actions of non-state actors (the insurgent) in relation to the state (the counter-insurgent) at the heart of the analysis.

Holistically, therefore, the model is able to conduct a macro-level analysis of the evolution of post-World War Two British counter-insurgency by accounting for agential and structural developments across the level of analysis spectrum. This is aided by the utility of a comparative case study approach that is historically-informed and methodologically reflexive in its use of primary source archival documents.

³⁰ David Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 2000), p.36.

³¹ Kennedy-Pipe, ‘International History and International Relations Theory’, p.745.

CHAPTER 3: *Rethinking the Malayan Emergency, 1948-60: The Counter-Insurgency Archetype?*

The British response to the 1948-1960 Malayan Emergency is widely considered to be the first modern counter-insurgency and is often regarded as the archetype of a successful operation by scholars and practitioners alike.¹ This chapter adopts the ‘Tripartite Counter-Insurgency model’ to explain why British operations in Malaya laid the foundations of a counter-insurgency paradigm that required the concomitant utilisation of military, intelligence and political means to ensure an eventual defeat of the insurgents. It also questions the notion of Malaya as an archetypal model of counter-insurgency success. British ‘victory’ must be contextualised with regard to the effects of several external factors, namely the fortuitous economic dividend resulting from the Korean War, the misapplication of guerrilla warfare tactics by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and their lack of popular support within Malaya and from outside sources. The chapter contends that a managed political withdrawal, in the context of decolonisation, was always an essential component of ensuring indigenous compliance for the Emergency and that twelve years to eradicate an isolated insurgent group is a campaign record not as deserving of the academic salutations it has parenthetically received.

¹ John Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002), p.31. Also see John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam (New Edition)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

The role of agency, namely the impact of General Sir Gerald Templer, within this structural model will also be accounted for, arguing that the agent-centric tendencies within elements of the ‘crowded historiography’² of the Malayan Emergency fail to appreciate the impact of external factors that greatly facilitated eventual success. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that the controversies surrounding British conduct in Malaya, such as detention without trial, abuse by British troops upon detainees, and the parallel use of ‘hearts and minds’ tactics are still relevant if not contentious in contemporary security studies. Ultimately, this case study holds that the lessons of the Malayan Emergency are perhaps over-exaggerated given the favourable conflict environment and ‘trial and error’ nature of strategic design. Although laying the foundations for future campaign conduct, we can witness during the Malayan Emergency the protracted construction of a slow burning strategy that would create the conditions by which an increasingly isolated and dwindling band of insurgents could extend their uprising for twelve years before the political and military conditions presaged an end to the Emergency. This is not the impression requisite of an archetypal counter-insurgency campaign.

Background to the Declaration of the Emergency

The Chinese had been immigrating to Malaya since the sixth century, and by the mid-twentieth century formed nearly forty per cent of the total Malayan population of 6.3

² Phillip Deery, ‘The Terminology of Terrorism: Malaya, 1948-52’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Vol.34 No.2 (June 2003), p.246.

million.³ Yet they remained socially and politically ostracised, particularly after the British officially secured Malaya with the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824. Employed mainly as rural labourers and miners, the ethnic Chinese were denied full citizenship in a country that by the late 1940s was the world's largest rubber producer. In 1947, Malayan rubber was the British Empire's best earner, totalling sales of US\$200million compared to Britain's entire exported goods value of US\$180million.⁴ The colonial metropole thus had good reason to ensure order in this prosperous part of the periphery. Yet political reform in Malaya in the immediate post-war period, necessitated by growing indigenous demands for a greater degree of governance, was to prove ill-thought out and ineffective. Humiliated by their defeat at the hands of the Japanese in the dense jungle of Malaya in World War Two, the British attempted to reorganise the political structure of their returned colony in the late 1940s. An initial constitution was established under the provisions of the Malayan Union in 1946 but was almost immediately disbanded due to vociferous opposition from the majority ethnic Malay population whose traditional rulers were still subjugated by a constitutionally superior British governor. An alternative settlement was eventually reached. In February 1948 the Federation of Malaya was inaugurated, which safeguarded the position of the regional sultans and restricted the citizenship rights of non-Malays, thus securing tacit acquiescence from the politically and economically dominant ethnic-Malays. This restriction further alienated the Chinese community not only from their Malay neighbours but from their British rulers. Some sought solace in the doctrine of communism, an ideology that had divided

³ Noel Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs: Malaya, 1948-1960* (London: Fontana Books, 1972), p.15; Sam C. Sarkesian, *Unconventional Conflicts in a New Security Era: Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), p.63.

⁴ Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency*, p.41.

China since the beginning of the civil war in 1927, and which was finding appeal among the diaspora. Established in 1930, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) had endured a short and largely unsuccessful infancy in which their seven thousand strong war-time militant grouping, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), failed to hold back the invading Imperial army. Indeed, the MPAJA was to a large extent funded and armed by the British in an attempt to maintain control of the colony. The equipment provided by the British in World War Two would eventually be used against them as the MCP turned its guerrilla tactics against the returned colonial ruler in 1948. Yet this was a gradual process, as post-war political settlements incrementally marginalised and radicalised elements of the Chinese-Malay population. Indeed, one of the leaders of the MCP, Chin Peng, was awarded the OBE for his war-time escapades alongside the British elite Special Operations Executive (SOE) unit, Force 136, before becoming one of the most elusive figureheads of the insurgent movement.

The racial tensions unleashed by the Federation constitution curtailed the legitimate options open to the predominantly ethnic Chinese MCP – of the 12,000 members in February 1947 all but 800 were Chinese.⁵ Combined with a crackdown on the wider leftist and trade union movement by the British authorities, the MCP's recourse to violence hardened. A violent flurry of attacks in 1948 on white settlers and rubber plantations – the symbols of perceived imperial control and exploitation – primed the conditions for a wider insurgent uprising. The historiography of the Emergency has been split about the immediate origins of the insurgency, particularly the extent to which it

⁵ Ibid, p.40.

was a long-term contrivance of the MCP, whether it was part of an international communist conspiracy, or whether it was a reaction to colonial aggression. Undeniably, the dogma of communism prepares its adherents for the eventual takeover of power, yet the MCP was not 'part of the Kremlin's world-wide campaign against the Western powers,' as initially depicted by the British government.⁶ What emerges instead is a picture of a communist party fuelled by the frustration of internal strife, angered by racial inequalities and spurred by ideological fervour.

As unrest grew, the MCP's newly formed Malayan People's Anti-British Army (MPABA) – an acronym deliberately chosen for its echoes of resistance against the last imperial invader - resorted to tactics of arson and murder directed towards British economic interests, especially rubber plantations. This should not lead to conclusions that Britain only leaped to the defence of their Malayan possession in the face of MCP aggression primarily to protect their economic resources. As Nicholas White points out, 'the degree of collusion between the British government and British business was limited. Government was often just too dispersed, representing too many varied viewpoints, to support British business in Malaya with definitive policies...'⁷ Indeed, British estate and plantation owners in Malaya – those on the front line of the insurgency and prime MCP targets - were generally dissatisfied with counter-insurgency defences

⁶ The National Archives (hereafter TNA), Kew, London, CO 537/5698, 'The Colonial Empire Today: Summary of Our Main Problems and Policies'. Colonial Office International Department paper, May 1950.

⁷ Nicholas White, *Business, Government and the End of Empire: Malaya, 1942-1957* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.16.

and the security offered to themselves and their commercial interests by the authorities.⁸ As the violence against British and settler targets spiralled, the colonial administration was forced to act, and on 19 June 1948 the High Commissioner, Sir Edward Gent, declared a Federation-wide State of Emergency, typifying a surprised reaction at an insurgency that the military, political and intelligence communities had failed to foresee.

The Political Management of the Malayan Emergency

The political impetus behind the initial counter-insurgency campaign was instantly limited. The failure of the authorities to prevent the escalation of MCP violence in the run-up to the declaration of the Emergency resulted in a loss of faith in Sir Edward Gent by the 12,000-strong ex-patriot community in Malaya. He was recalled to London in order to resign just two weeks after the insurgency broke out. The three month interregnum between Gent's death and the appointment of Sir Henry Gurney as his successor in October was a period of confusion and floundering for the British.

One crucial way in which the political authorities tried to regain control of the situation and contain the insurgency through legalistic means was via the introduction of draconian Emergency legislation. One of the most important and controversial measures to be passed was Emergency Regulation 17D in January 1949, which provided for both

⁸ See chapter 3 of Noel Barber's *War of the Running Dogs* for an illustration of how planters relied on their own private security to fend off insurgent attacks in the early phase of the Emergency.

mass detentions without trial and wide-scale squatter relocation operations. One in ten of the Malayan population were squatters, eking out a living on the jungle fringes. These people were strategically imperative to the counter-insurgency strategy, as the MCP cajoled them into providing food and information. In the first nine months over 6,000 people had been forcibly removed in an attempt to undermine the *Min Yuen* (People's Movement), the clandestine recruitment and supply network of the MCP who covertly operated within squatter communities. By March 1950 that figure had risen to over 11,500. Relocation operations were to be given far more cohesion and order with the advent of the Briggs Plan, which will be analysed in detail later. The second implication of 17D was the ability of the authorities to arrest and detain without trial suspects thought to be co-operating or actively participating with the MCP. The legislation enabled the police to hold individuals for six months without trial, soon rising to one year, and then eventually two years. Just one month into the insurgency and around 1,500 people were being held under such decrees.⁹ Here we see the historical use of detention without trial as a vital component of the politico-legal side of counter-insurgency strategy. It is not a new controversy. Instant population control, decreed by sweeping laws, has long been an element of British strategy, and Malaya provides an ideal case in point. Other Emergency regulations included the ability to restrict transport movement on the roads, the power to hold all non-capital offence crimes in secret, and crucially, the right to register the entire population and issue identity cards. Despite the sweeping nature of the Emergency regulations in late 1950 the government was forced to repel calls, mainly from the European planters, for the implementation of martial law.

⁹ Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948-1960* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1975), p.184.

After weighing up the relative advantages, it was decided that the existing legislation and the continuation of civilian rule was sufficient.¹⁰ Regulation 17D was eventually abolished in autumn 1953, after the insurgency had been brought under control, but not until 29,828 suspects had been detained and questioned without recourse to due legal process.¹¹ In mid-1950 the British government even considered establishing a massive detention centre on Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean as a means of speeding up the repatriation process for Chinese detainees whilst simultaneously eliminating security threats on Malayan soil, although the plan never came into fruition.¹² By the end of the Emergency, 226 MCP members had been executed for taking part in guerrilla activities that resulted in the death of members of the British or Malayan security forces.¹³

One of the most interesting aspects of the British response was not one of military resources or intelligence accuracy, but one of semantics. As has been noted in some quarters, the historiography of the Malayan Emergency has largely failed to focus on the political language in which Malaya was couched by the political, military and intelligence communities. As Phillip Deery, one of the few to rectify this omission, points out, Malaya is an excellent case study for analysing normative counter-insurgency semantics as it ‘clearly shows the British government grappling with this issue of political terminology within the broader context of anti-Communist propaganda’.¹⁴ One of the consequences of Whitehall word-watching was the decision to label the

¹⁰ TNA, CO 537/4773, ‘Draft Memorandum on the Implications of a Declaration of Martial Law’.

¹¹ Barber, *War of the Running Dogs*, p.182.

¹² TNA, CAB 21/1681, ‘Cabinet Malaya Committee – MAL.C.(50) 25, 14 July 1950 – ‘Various Matters Discussed with the Authorities in Malaya: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies’.

¹³ Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency*, p.46.

¹⁴ Deery, ‘The Terminology of Terrorism’, p.232.

insurgency in Malaya an 'Emergency' rather than an outright 'war'. This belies a deeper, hardened financial and political appreciation of the situation. In a state of war private insurance companies could forfeit payments to rubber plantation and tin mine owners for damage or loss of property, meaning that compensation responsibility fell on the government. In the context of the dollar deficit of the late 1940s, this was a financial load the Attlee government was unable and unwilling to bear. By the 1950s, UK investment in Malaya tipped £10million, representing, in the eyes of Whitehall, a colony that was as economically significant as India had been before independence.¹⁵ For these reasons, the initial phrase chosen to label MRLA guerrillas was 'bandit' – a politicised epithet implying lawlessness, illegitimacy and lack of popular support. However, in May 1952 the term was dropped because, as Deery notes, 'the gulf between image and reality was too wide'.¹⁶ 'Communist Terrorist', or more commonly 'CT', was now the preferred moniker, largely because it helped contextualise the MCP within the perceived threat of international communism. However, the debate about semantics remained a political sideshow to the main task of defeating the insurgents through a combination of military deftness, accurate intelligence and politically-motivated 'hearts and minds' operations. This, however, would prove an ideal-type counter-insurgency paradigm that would prove somewhat removed from actual strategic and tactical implementation.

¹⁵ White, *Business, Government and the End of Empire*, p.11.

¹⁶ Deery, 'The Terminology of Terrorism', p.240.

Political String-Pulling and the Managed Withdrawal

It was not just the military and intelligence communities that had to adopt a nuanced strategy geared towards undermining the insurgency. British politicians, and their representatives in the Malayan administration, bore the responsibility of ensuring that the MCP were out-manoeuvred on the political front. Ultimately, this would involve the stage-managed independence of Malaya and the hand-over of power to a moderate and acceptable post-colonial regime. In this sense, decolonisation was actually utilised as a counter-insurgency tool.

One of the first political pressures put on the Attlee government at the immediate outbreak of the Emergency was the need to reassure the Malayan and British people that his government was committed to defeating the communist insurgency despite the initial difficulties faced by the security forces. In the House of Commons in April 1949, the Prime Minister stated: 'His Majesty's Government have no intention of relinquishing their responsibilities in Malaya until their task is completed... We have no intention of jeopardising the security, well-being and liberty of these peoples, for whom Britain has responsibilities, by a premature withdrawal.'¹⁷ It appears through later statements made by Attlee that even before Churchill and Eden's realisation that Malaya must have self-government, a politically stage-managed withdrawal was an integral part of ensuring that the insurgency could be fatally undermined by decolonising Malaya and establishing it as an independent democracy. As early as March 1950, Attlee had stated

¹⁷ *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, Vol.463, 1948-49, March 21-April 14 (13 April 1949) Col.2815.

to the Commons: '[I]t is our firm intention to implement the policy [in Malaya]... of steady democratic progress towards self-government within the Commonwealth.'¹⁸ The Attlee administration does not receive enough plaudits for its far-sighted conclusions that in order for Malaya to have a safe and secure future, it must be self-governed. Decolonisation was not just an irreversible post-war reality, but in this sense could actually be used to achieve a military withdrawal from a campaign that was proving a drain on the Treasury and Malayan economic resources.¹⁹ In this context, Churchill's 1951 Conservative administration receives an overt amount of praise. For those like A.J Stockwell, the turning point in Malaya came with the return of Churchill to office, arguing that in conjunction with Oliver Lyttelton at the Colonial Office, Churchill ensured that 'military vigour and political sense' was brought to the counter-insurgency campaign.²⁰ This, though, places too much emphasis on the power of an ailing Prime Minister whose domestic problems overshadowed a conflict on the edge of the fading Empire. Even the last major biography of Churchill, written by Roy Jenkins, does not deem the Emergency worthy of indexing, so little was Churchill actually concerned with the day-to-day running of the campaign.²¹ Overtly agent-centric accounts of British victory that accredit individuals on the ground in Malaya, such as Templer, are contentious enough, but to endorse Churchill as turning around the Malayan Emergency is misty-eyed bulldog romanticism.

¹⁸ *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, Vol.473, 1950, March 27-April 6 (28 March 1950) Col.180.

¹⁹ The total cost of the Emergency was put at £70 million, from the outbreak in June 1948 to Malayan independence in August 1957. The British shouldered £52 million of this cost, with the rest being provided by the Malayan authorities (TNA, WO 106/5990, 'Director of Operations, Malaya: Review of the Emergency in Malaya from June 1948 to August 1957', September 1957).

²⁰ A.J Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonisation in Malaya, 1942-52', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.13 No.1 (October 1984), p.70.

²¹ Roy Jenkins, *Churchill*, (London: Pan, 2002).

As the military side of the counter-insurgency campaign was virtually over by 1955, it became clear that the political side held the key to actually sealing an end to the insurgency. In December of that year a 'backchannel' was opened between the newly elected Alliance government and the MCP in the jungle-edge town of Baling on the Thai border. The MCP revealed that they wished to end their struggle with the granting of an amnesty, as well as seeking political legitimacy for the MCPs programme at the next election. The government delegation, led by Chief Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, dismissed these demands (unsurprising, given the level of briefing he had received from the British beforehand). As a consequence, negotiations disintegrated and no deal was reached, but the very conduct of this meeting in itself demonstrated a willingness to ensure a managed political end to the conflict, and reveals a historic legacy of the British opening a 'backchannel' with insurgents in order to try and attain a negotiated settlement long before the controversies surrounding secret talks with the IRA in the 1970s.

By early 1956 Malaya was set on a course for independence. A conference in London set the date of 31 August 1957 as independence, or *Merdeka*, day. The interim period would see a gradual withdrawal of British personnel and the fledgling Malayan government take up more powers as the British ceded them. This would ensure a smooth full transfer of power the following year, when the Union Jack was lowered in Kuala Lumpur on the exact date set eighteen months earlier. By ensuring that Malaya became a sovereign state on its own terms, Britain undermined the entire MCP insurgency by

doing exactly what it least expected them to do. As Robert Thompson astutely observed: '[Chin Peng] started a war to kick out the British Imperialists – and now there aren't any. We've not been kicked out – we've left, head high, and it's the British who gave Independence to Malaya, not Chin Peng.'²² Such other attempts at undermining an insurgency can be witnessed in the numerous efforts to establish devolved government's at Stormont in Northern Ireland, and most recently the creation of an elected post-Saddam government in Iraq. The devolution of powers to indigenous authorities paves the way for a military withdrawal – but a successful devolution only comes when the military campaign has been satisfactorily concluded.

The Military Response to the Malayan Emergency

Two days before the Emergency was declared, Lieutenant-Colonel John Dalley, head of the Malayan Security Service, wrote a memo stating: 'At the time of writing there is no immediate threat to internal security in Malaya...'²³ Internal intelligence analysis had completely misinterpreted the intentions and strength of the MCP and as a result all branches of authority in Malaya were unprepared for the beginning of the insurgency. The intelligence services had little gauge of MCP numbers or organizational structure, largely because pre-Emergency intelligence had focussed on the potential threat of

²² Quoted in Barber, *War of the Running Dogs*, p.235.

²³ TNA, CO 537/6006, 'Internal Security – Malaya.' Malayan Security Service report by Director John Dalley, 14 June 1948.

Malay nationalism.²⁴ The Malayan police were in an equal state of unreadiness, lacking adequate weaponry, communication equipment, vehicles and personnel. The army was also unprepared to fight. Counter-insurgency, at this stage, was not a central operational tenet of the British army, despite recent experiences in Palestine. This cause was not helped by a psychology of arrogance on behalf of the military hierarchy. On 6 July 1948 Major-General Bower, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) Malaya, declared in a broadcast: 'I have had experience fighting red terrorists in Greece and India, and I can tell you this is by far the easiest problem I have ever tackled.'²⁵ This belief was to prove unfounded as the British constructed a campaign designed in increments, often haphazardly, which eventually created a 'minimum force/maximum output' military strategy based on local intelligence, all of which was politically managed and controlled from London. Yet this was all slowly implemented, with gradual effectiveness, negating the impact that a swift military response would have had on an infant insurgency.

At the outset of the Emergency there were just ten battalions of troops in Malaya – three Malay, two British and five Ghurkha – totalling no more than 4,000 combat-ready troops.²⁶ Significantly, this was almost the same number of MCP guerrillas who had taken to the jungle after the Malayan police, some 9,000 strong in 1948, had made initial raids on known communist encampments. By the end of August 1948 up to 4,500 people

²⁴ John Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency: An Analysis of the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1954* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), p.25.

²⁵ Ibid, pp.31-32.

²⁶ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, p.65.

had been arrested, not only for MCP membership but as part of a general crackdown on the entire left, including the trade unions, in an attempt to prevent any kind of solidarity action by movements sympathetic to the MCP cause.

The army still appeared to be in a World War Two mindset, fixed on a conventional approach of large sweeps through the jungle that were heard long in advance by the guerrillas. The thick jungle of Malaya, which covered around 80 per cent of the entire country, rendered traditional army weaponry and tactics useless. Air monopoly meant little until the SAS began to use parachute jumps as a means of troop deployment, as close combat became the only means of engagement with the enemy. This insurgency was to be a steep learning curve for the British, and represents the genesis of their slow learning, slow burning legacy in counter-insurgency campaigns.

The Briggs Plan

Thankfully for the British, despite the short-comings of their initial strategic planning, the insurgents displayed an unwillingness to attack guarded targets. The MPABA had retreated into the jungle in late 1948 to undergo a self-enforced period of reorganisation, training and tactical revision in the wake of the initial British response. They emerged from the jungle as the renamed Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA), a name change arguably instigated to ensure a more catchall base of support. By the end of 1949 MRLA offensives rose to an average of 400 a month compared to 100 in the spring of

that year.²⁷ By early 1950, as John Coates as stated, ‘the tide of insurgency began to flood out of control’.²⁸ The number of incidents directed against colonial capitalist interests, their workers, and British army troops rose to 221 in February alone, hitting a peak of 571 in October the same year. It was this rapid increase in attacks that sparked calls, again especially from the ex-patriot planting community, that a military Director of Operations be appointed to co-ordinate the military side of the counter-insurgency campaign.

Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Briggs was appointed to this new post on 3 April 1950, and he immediately embarked on a swift nationwide tour to build up a picture of the state of the British campaign. His findings were formalised in a subsequent report, known simply as the Briggs Plan, which was delivered to the authorities in May 1950.²⁹ The essence of the plan was the belief that the insurgency could be defeated if the terrorists were cut off from their support base. By severing the link between the MCP guerrillas and the *Min Yuen*, the insurgent campaign would be cut off from its food and information supply. This could be achieved via a more coherent and systematic resettlement campaign than the previously ‘haphazard and inefficient’ scheme for the squatters.³⁰ Entirely new Resettlement Areas were to be constructed, with new huts built for squatters who were granted the land deeds for their plot. Sanitation and medical facilities were provided for these newly constructed communities. However, it must be

²⁷ Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency*, p.45.

²⁸ Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, p.79.

²⁹ A full copy of the report can be found in TNA, CAB 21/1681, Cabinet Malaya Committee - MAL C(50)23.

³⁰ Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, p.87.

remembered that they functioned as a tool of population control and coercion. Despite being depicted as a central tenet of the 'hearts and minds' campaign, the movements of those re-housed in Resettlement Areas were severely restricted outside the barbed wire perimeter fence. The forcible resettlement of hitherto rural and isolated squatters into self-contained social units, where the political framework was defined by the government, resulted in a coercive acquiescence towards the British agenda for Malaya.³¹

Between 1950 and 1960 more than 500 resettlement areas were built, 400 of which were constructed in the first two years, witnessing the movement of over 400,000 people – four-fifths of the entire amount relocated during the entire Emergency.³² However, victory never seemed assured after the initiation of resettlement. MRLA activity and numbers (8,000 by 1951) continued to grow and intensify, peaking with the audacious assassination of the High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, on 6 October 1951. This added to an increased sense of British despondency. By early to mid-1951 progress in 'clearing' areas of insurgents was slow and political hopes of a military success had faded. This view is reflected in the cabinet discussions held at the time. The Defence Minister, Emmanuel Shinwell, lamented the 'little, if any progress' being made³³; the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Slim, aired his views that the 'situation in

³¹ Ibid, p.93.

³² Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency*, p.50.

³³ TNA, PREM 8/1406 (Part II), Memorandum from Minister of Defence to CIGS, 3 May 1951. Also see Simon C. Smith, 'General Templer and Counter-Insurgency in Malaya: Hearts and Minds, Intelligence and Propaganda', *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.16 No.3 (Autumn 2001), p.64.

Malaya is still far from satisfactory'³⁴; and Briggs himself, who was brought before the cabinet twice, was forced to admit that his plan was 'proceeding far too slowly.'³⁵ His resettlement plan may not have functioned as effectively as was hoped, but that was not the extent of Briggs' contribution. He had laid the foundations for eventual future success and had ensured that the military strategy employed in Malaya took account of the political nature of the conflict. This acknowledgment was evident in one of his first actions as Director of Operations. The establishment of the Federal Joint Intelligence Advisory Committee in May 1950 centralised and co-ordinated intelligence collection, evaluation and dissemination. In the same vein, Briggs oversaw the creation of the Federal War Council to ensure cross-service co-ordination and liaison for the counter-insurgency campaign, including civil, police and military figures. District and State War Executive Committees (DWECS and SWECS) were also set up to implement plans locally.³⁶ The accumulative result of these initiatives was to greatly improve the administrative ability to deal with operations effectively and vastly improve the intelligence on which military decisions and political priorities could be made. Despite a lack of total success, Briggs should be accredited with launching 'the insurgent organization on an irreversible slide towards destruction.'³⁷ Yet it still remains indictable that it took over two years into the insurgency before a comprehensive strategy was fully enunciated. Again, we can see the germinal origins of twentieth-century slow burning British counter-insurgency planning manifest itself.

³⁴ TNA, PREM 8/1406 (Part II), Memorandum from Chief of Imperial General Staff to Minister of Defence (MO2/464/51) 4 May 1951.

³⁵ Briggs was brought back to London twice to meet the cabinet and explain the progress of his plan. The first meeting took place on 27 November 1950 and then again on 1 December 1950 (TNA, CAB 130/65, Cabinet Meeting with the Director of Operations, Federation of Malaya, GEN 345/1 and GEN 345/4).

³⁶ TNA, CAB 21/1681, 'Director of Operations, Malaya: Directive No.1', 16 April 1950.

³⁷ Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, p.99.

In the early years of the Emergency security force operations were characterised by 'search and destroy' missions based on a dearth of intelligence.³⁸ Indeed, the majority of British troops who served in Malaya were young men on compulsory national service with no combat experience. Even among the older hands there were few with jungle experience. From this rather unpromising start, the British military were slow to shift tactical and operational gears. So why the common perception of Malaya as an outstanding exemplar of counter-insurgency success? According to John Nagl, the British succeeded in Malaya, specifically in contrast to the American failure in Vietnam, because the British army had an organisational culture akin to a 'learning institution', whereby the army quickly adapted to counter-insurgency conditions and changed tactics accordingly.³⁹ The array of operational experiences the British army has undergone, from limited to total war, has arguably led to a greater degree of pragmatism in its military outlook. A dogmatic adherence to rigid military doctrine has been absent. However, this does not explain, nor should it detract, from the languid application of appropriate irregular warfare tactics and the absence of swift strategic design.

³⁸ Alan Hoe and Eric Morris, *Re-enter the SAS: The Special Air Service and the Malayan Emergency* (London: Leo Cooper, 1994), p.33.

³⁹ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup*, p.xxii.

By 1950 the number of battalions in Malaya had risen from ten to just thirteen, nearly all of which were under strength.⁴⁰ In 1953 the number had reached twenty-four, perhaps one of the most important additions being that of the reconstituted Special Air Service (SAS). Malaya marked the first outing of the reformed Special Forces unit since the end of World War Two. An ad hoc group of war veterans and army regulars had formed the first British fighting force in Malaya known as the Ferret Force. This was superseded by Brigadier Mike Calvert's Malayan Scouts, an SAS group that was better equipped for jungle-based counter-insurgency. By 1955 the number of SAS troops operating in Malaya numbered some 560, divided into five squadrons.⁴¹ Utilised as a complementary unit to the wider military effort, the SAS fulfilled a narrow, yet crucial, tactical role in Malaya and would continue to do so in future counter-insurgencies. However, reliance on Special Force success does little to fulfil the pervasive policing and security role required of the regular military in counter-insurgency campaigns. Despite this, those close to the SAS attribute the turning of the tide of the Emergency to the introduction of the regiment. General Sir Peter de la Billiere, a new recruit in Malaya and future Director of the SAS, asserts that it was the SAS 'who alone had the ability to patrol for long periods in the deep jungle to which the terrorists had retreated.'⁴² Although such a view contains an element of truth, such a narrow and proudly regimental assessment risks allowing the SAS to take the glory for the patient, steady soldiering of the mainstream British army, the painstaking intelligence-gathering process, and the political emphasis on the 'hearts and minds' approach. Nevertheless, Malaya would

⁴⁰ Short, *The Communist Insurrection*, p.225.

⁴¹ Anthony Kemp, *The SAS: Savage Wars of Peace, 1947 to the Present* (London: Penguin, 2001), p.29.

⁴² General Sir Peter de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble: SAS to Gulf Command* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), p.107.

prove just how important Special Forces operations would become to British strategy in future counter-insurgency campaigns.

Arguably, before Briggs' shake up of the administrative system that called for closer civilian-military ties, the army had failed to adopt an appropriate structure for low intensity conflict, had failed to set realistic goals in terms of the time scale of operations, and did not acknowledge that command needed to be shared with civilian politicians. The combination of troop shortages and lack of strategic cohesion resulted in what Richard Stubbs has pointed to as a fundamental security paradox, whereby the security forces 'were clearly unable to protect the bulk of the population, especially those in the more remote rural areas, from guerrilla pressures, but at the same time they expected full co-operation from those people in rooting out the communists.'⁴³ By the spring of 1950 the MRLA were recruiting more members than were being killed or captured as the police seemed impotent to halt the murder of civilians. As a result of this much debate has been created regarding the issue of 'tie-down ratios' between British troops and MRLA insurgents. Richard Clutterbuck is keen to point out that many commentators who cite 'tie-down ratios' in order to depict the overwhelming strength of British numbers fail to take into account that just over half of a battalion's strength is made up of actual combat troops, with the rest providing logistical support and supply tasks. Up until 1952, Clutterbuck argues, the ratio of insurgents to actual combat troops was

⁴³ Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004), pp.76-77.

evenly matched (4,000 each in 1948, 8,000 by 1951).⁴⁴ As the Emergency gradually turned in the British favour in 1952 only then did the British develop a 2:1 majority ratio, much lower than other estimates that fail to take into account such calculations.⁴⁵ Again, this contributes to a wider picture of inadequate strategic planning. Yet such deficiencies would be robustly addressed with the arrival of General Gerald Templer.

The Templer Effect

The figure of Sir Gerald Templer divides the historiography of the Malayan Emergency more than any other issue. Reviled by some for being little more than ‘an enthusiastic Boy Scout’⁴⁶ who presided over a ‘temporary dictatorship’⁴⁷, he was in equal measure revered by others as a man whose ‘energy, infectious enthusiasm and drive’⁴⁸ earned him the epithet ‘the Tiger of Malaya.’⁴⁹

The death of Gurney and the retirement of Briggs soon after created an opportunity for the new Conservative government to unify the civilian and military command under one post in an attempt to strengthen the counter-insurgency effort. Templer was eventually

⁴⁴ Richard Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: The Emergency in Malaya, 1948-1960* (London: Cassell, 1967), p.43.

⁴⁵ For example, see Robert O. Tilman, ‘The Non-Lessons of the Malayan Emergency’, *Asian Survey*, Vol.6 No.8 (1966), p.418, where he estimates that the troop to insurgent ratio was as high as 31:1.

⁴⁶ T.N Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.311.

⁴⁷ Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, p.80.

⁴⁸ Brian Stewart, ‘Winning in Malaya: An Intelligence Success Story’, *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.14 No.4 (Winter 1999), p.276.

⁴⁹ John Cloake, *Templer: Tiger of Malaya* (London: Harrap, 1985).

appointed as dual High Commissioner and Director of Operations in February 1952. Upon his arrival in Malaya he openly committed himself to the central tenets of the Briggs Plan as the mainstay of his own tenure in office. However, Templer succeeded where Briggs' own plan was floundering due to his injection of urgency into the campaign. As Anthony Short puts it: 'In a word, Templer can be said to have energised the situation'.⁵⁰ Yet inspirational leadership has its flipside, and Templer's no-nonsense approach in some quarters created a negative backlash as some communities resented increasingly stringent food rations, curfews and detentions that Templer had instigated. Templer was acutely aware of the need to utilise local intelligence and win round local populations as the key to victory in the insurgency. As John Coates observes, Templer 'grasped firmly that he was engaged in a contest for government with the MCP and that the war would be lost if it were left to the soldiers and the police.'⁵¹ To this extent, Templer acknowledged that if political progress, through constitutional concessions, were to be made then the rural Chinese population must be part of the process, ensuring that the voting franchise was extended to the ethnic Chinese. Furthermore, Malay chief executives were installed in every state in an attempt by Templer to foster the emergence of moderate political movements, especially as independence became increasingly likely. The United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) were the two most prominent groupings, particularly the latter as it aimed to become a non-communist alternative for the Chinese community. This political strategy was to be a potent one in undermining the MCP's insurgency. The UMNO and the MCA united to form the Alliance Party in 1954, and in the first federal elections that

⁵⁰ Short, *The Communist Insurrection*, p.343.

⁵¹ Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, p.114.

were held in June 1955 they won 51 of the 52 seats. The new Chief Minister, Alliance leader Tunku Abdul Rahman, was eager to quicken the pace of full independence, however, the British security forces, aided by an increasingly growing Malayan army, still had to kill-off the military side of the campaign before the cessation of colonial rule could be achieved.

Undeniably, the counter-insurgency campaign swung massively in favour of the British as the MRLA crumbled into a dwindling force of beleaguered guerrillas. During Templer's time in post between 1952 and 1954, insurgent incidents fell from 500 to fewer than 100 a month.⁵² But one of the main questions is the extent to which Templer himself can personally take the credit for this outcome. His bold leadership style, his appreciation that there should be an intricate marriage between normal and Emergency government activities, and his emphasis on 'hearts and minds' within the Chinese population all helped strengthen British confidence and helped build a more coherent counter-insurgency campaign, from a military, political and intelligence perspective. John Nagl asserts that: 'It is difficult to overstate the impact that Templer... had on the course of the Emergency.'⁵³ Arguably, the opposite is true: it is *easy* to overstate Templer's role. His high profile and blustering style may have made him the personal embodiment of success, however, Templer was in fact improving and modifying tactics established by Briggs. It was Briggs who had first initiated a much-needed overhaul of the intelligence system, had first introduced a professional propaganda campaign, and

⁵² Kumar Ramakrishna, 'Transmogrifying' Malaya: The Impact of Sir Gerald Templer (1952-54)', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol.32 No.1 (February 2001), p.79.

⁵³ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, p.89.

had made political overtures to the Chinese population. In this sense, Karl Hack's argument that the counter-insurgency campaign had already reached its turning point before Templer's arrival has credence.⁵⁴ Templer has been credited with too much. For example, the MCP's October Directives (discussed fully in the next section), which reverted MRLA tactics away from guerrilla attacks to political education in October 1951, were not made public until December 1952. The resulting lull in MRLA violence between these dates (from 6,000 incidents in 1951 to 3,700 in 1952) was thus wrongly perceived as a side-effect of Templer's strong and effective leadership.⁵⁵ Yet, neither should this argument be seen as an attempt to wholly shift credit away from Templer to Briggs. Agent-centric accounts are unrewarding in terms of allowing us to see the wider picture, the percolation of initiatives and changes throughout the military, intelligence and political structures. Furthermore, they fail to take into account decisions and actions taken by agents external to the British counter-insurgency outfit, as the October Directives episode proves. We must be pragmatic about the role of Templer in relation to counter-insurgency success in Malaya. As John Coates rightly points out: 'one must not overestimate the contribution of one man... (despite the fact that he) succeeded beyond anyone's expectations.'⁵⁶ As the arguments surrounding Templer demonstrate, it is essential that we avoid being what I would label 'internally agent-centric' and fail to account for the actions, for example, of indigenous forces.

⁵⁴ Karl Hack, "Iron Claws on Malaya": The Historiography of the Malayan Emergency', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol.30 No.1 (March 1999), pp.99-125.

⁵⁵ Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, pp.159-160.

⁵⁶ Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, p.132.

Use of the Indigenous Troops and Police

The local population plays an essential role in any counter-insurgency campaign. Intelligence gathering is made easier by the natural trust between indigenous forces and local communities. Furthermore, indigenous forces understand the often complex tribal loyalties and relationships that frequently determine access to information or decision-making, all of which, despite language skills and 'hearts and minds' emphasis, will always remain alien to outside forces. John Nagl goes as far as to suggest that 'on their own, foreign forces cannot defeat an insurgency; the best they can hope for is to create the conditions that will enable local forces to win it for them.'⁵⁷ The British authorities were to become acutely aware of this necessity.

In order to boost troop numbers and immediately strengthen the counter-insurgency campaign, a Special Constabulary was established, largely as a means of providing security for Malaya's approximate 3,000 rubber estates. Initial hopes of recruiting up to 15,000 men were soon surpassed as nearly 24,000 had enrolled by September 1948, reaching a peak of 41,000 by late 1952.⁵⁸ However, the almost exclusive Malay make up of this force combined with the lack of security offered to Chinese owned estates, aroused resentment and mistrust amongst the Chinese community. This was exacerbated by the Manpower Regulations of February 1951, which required young Chinese men to enrol for service in the police force. This highly controversial and unpopular measure

⁵⁷ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, p.xiv.

⁵⁸ Short, *The Communist Insurrection*, pp.124-125.

prompted many to evade the authorities, some even by returning to China. Eventually just 2,000 Chinese were drafted into the police under these regulations. Nevertheless, the special constabulary was crucial in fulfilling a low-key security role that would free up regular army troops for larger operations.

Briggs was aware of the need to ensure the support of the non-communist Chinese population and to involve them in the counter-insurgency campaign. A Home Guard organisation was developed, which simultaneously played upon the fears the Chinese population had of being intrinsically stereotyped as communist guerrillas, whilst distinguishing the Guard from normal security forces, thus undermining views that members were traitors voluntarily aiding the British occupiers. Resettlement areas were encouraged to establish a Home Guard unit, and once the District Officer became assured of its loyalty they were distributed with shotguns. Units would then report the names and movements of those in their area in an attempt to identify possible *Min Yuen* activists. In larger towns, domestic Chinese auxiliary police units were formed. However, both forces were chronically short of arms, and were largely out of police control. Even 400 Chinese were recruited to become detectives in the regular police. Although pay incentives were given, by Briggs' own admission they were of 'poor quality'.⁵⁹ By 1953, however, the ranks of the Home Guard had swelled to 250,000 eighteen to fifty-five year olds, most of whom were Malay, but an extra 50,000 Chinese were enlisted on the orders of Templer to ensure a non-communist influence on their

⁵⁹ Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency*, p.98.

fellow Chinese.⁶⁰ However, the training and effectiveness of the Home Guard units has led Anthony Short to conclude that: ‘the presence of Home Guard was not necessarily to be equated with the security of a New Village’, despite being responsible for the protection of seventy-two New Villages by the end of 1953.⁶¹ An overhaul of the Home Guard in 1956 saw the remnants of the units being stood down and placed on unarmed duties, however, the experiment with armed civilian units was an essential one as it demonstrated that the British trusted the Malaysians enough to guard themselves and their communities from the insurgent threat therefore depicting counter-insurgency as a nationwide team-effort.

Another essential demographic group that the British needed to win round were the jungle aborigines, the *orang asli*, whose importance to the counter-insurgency campaign increased when a revised government estimate of their numbers leaped from 34,000 to somewhere between 68-100,000. Their jungle dwellings placed them in a natural proximity to the insurgents and maintained the ability to pass food and supplies should they be willing. The British response was to employ aborigines as intelligence gatherers, made possible by the construction of so-called jungle forts where British forces were based and able to liaise with aborigines as to MRLA movement in the jungle. Groups of jungle natives who had been resettled were returned to their original dwellings as early as 1951 in order to fill erstwhile intelligence vacuums in the jungle. Their natural jungle craft and survival skills made the aborigines more adept at tracking insurgent movement

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.54.

⁶¹ Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, pp.412-13.

than British security forces, an acknowledged reality when by 1956 aborigines formed armed auxiliary police units and were sent to track MCP couriers through the jungle. In the final years of the Emergency a 300-strong aboriginal unit known as *Senoi Pra'ak* ('Fighting People') killed more insurgents than the rest of the security forces combined.⁶² Indigenous help was thus essential in low-key and prominent ways.

Although superior manpower is obviously important, strength in numbers does not win an insurgency alone. Military flexibility and innovation is also essential, either when reacting to an attack or when taking the offensive to the enemy. The British belatedly acknowledged this in Malaya by adopting a number of tactical measures. The establishment of the Far Eastern Land Forces Training Centre (FTC) – commonly known as the Jungle Warfare School – helped foster, for the first time in the British army's history, a counter-insurgency military ethos. The doctrine that emerged from the school was enshrined in the ATOM manual (officially titled 'The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya'), which effectively became the British army's counter-insurgency handbook. Such tactical innovations, combined with increased cross-branch liaison with the intelligence and political communities introduced by Briggs, ensured greater steps towards formalising a British approach to counter-insurgency campaigns. Implicit in this was an acknowledgement of the prolonged temporal context of counter-insurgency. Indeed, the Operations Research Section (ORS) of the Director of Operations staff estimated that it took approximately 1,800 hours of patrolling to catch

⁶² Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p.153.

one insurgent in Malaya.⁶³ This ratio required not only an ethos of patience within the military, but also the cultivation of an effective intelligence network.

‘Malaya is an Intelligence War’⁶⁴

In the years prior to the Emergency, intelligence was ‘Britain’s Achilles heel’.⁶⁵ Intelligence agencies, especially the Malayan Security Service (MSS) were unprepared for the MCP’s adoption of revolutionary guerrilla warfare. The intelligence and security agencies jealously guarded their own fiefdoms. Co-operation was lacking in the early Emergency years, even to the extent that the director of the MSS, John Dalley, was refused permission to attend meetings of the Joint Intelligence Committee of the Far East.⁶⁶ The reorganisation of such a chaotic intelligence system was thus initiated in August 1948, whereby the MSS was scrapped and its responsibilities passed to Malaya’s newly created police Special Branch. However, Special Branch’s effectiveness was to be compromised by a lack of resources and manpower. At its inception it had just twelve officers and forty-four inspectors. Briggs began his tenure as Director of Operations by initiating another intelligence review in 1950, which included a recruitment drive for Special Branch. By 1953 they had 123 officers and 195 inspectors, most of whom were

⁶³ Raffi Gregorian, ‘Jungle Bashing’ in Malaya: Towards a Formal Tactical Doctrine’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.5 No.3 (Winter 1994), p.351.

⁶⁴ General Templer, quoted in Barber, *War of the Running Dogs*, p.137.

⁶⁵ Karl Hack, ‘British Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in the Era of Decolonisation: The Example of Malaya’, *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.14 No.2 (Summer 1999), p.127.

⁶⁶ Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2002), p.497.

ex-patriots with experience in other British colonies, mainly Palestine.⁶⁷ Conscious of the importance of intelligence to winning the Emergency, General Sir John Harding, Commander in Chief of the Far East Land Forces, conceded in 1950 that: 'Our greatest weakness now is the lack of early and accurate information of the enemy's strengths, dispositions and intentions.'⁶⁸ Aware of the intelligence short-comings, Briggs established a federal Intelligence Advisory Committee to improve the co-ordination of intelligence on the insurgents in May 1950. Sir William Jenkin was appointed Director of Intelligence (DOI) in August that year, charged with police, but not military or intelligence operations – a move perhaps reflecting the initial inclination of the political authorities to turn to special military operations rather than to the intelligence services as the first weapon to beat the insurgents. It would take until 1952 for both the political and military communities to realise that intelligence held the key to 'winning' in Malaya. General Templer, himself a former Director of Military Intelligence, acknowledged as much when he stated upon his arrival in 1952 that the Emergency 'will be won by our intelligence system.'⁶⁹ Yet this represented a distinct case of closing the door once the horse has bolted.

The arrival of Colonel Arthur Young as Commissioner of Police in April 1952 saw Templer grant Special Branch more independence. In the same month Jack Morton, formerly the MI5 station chief in Singapore, became DOI and oversaw the long-needed amalgamation of police and military intelligence. Furthermore, Templer ensured the

⁶⁷ Hack, 'British Intelligence', p.128.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Short, *The Communist Insurrection*, pp.229-230.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency*, p.54.

placement of Military Intelligence Officers in Special Branch in order to identify and disseminate operational intelligence regarding immediate insurgent movements, particularly that generated from surrendered enemy personnel (SEP). This union of police and military intelligence brokered long-standing differences in intelligence priorities that had previously hindered the counter-insurgency effort. As Sir Henry Gurney observed as far back as February 1949: ‘In this sort of thing troops are useless without police.’⁷⁰ This was to be a lesson that the British would have to re-learn in subsequent insurgencies despite the delayed appreciation of the axiomatic nature of such inter-agency co-operation.

By 1957, the intelligence services were employing four main tactics in Malaya: agents within the *Min Yuen*; non-communist informers; air reconnaissance over cleared areas; and SEP intelligence.⁷¹ The importance of this strategy was not lost on the political elites. In 1955, in the wake of an Empire-wide report into British intelligence capabilities by General Templer, the Colonial Office established its own Intelligence and Security Department manned by MI5 officials. In three years fifty-seven visits were made to twenty-seven colonies, during which local Special Branches were established and specialist training given to local intelligence officers. By 1957 1,866 police officers were seconded to intelligence duties across the British Empire, excluding Malaya.⁷² Such an expansion of numbers and training across colonies would prove vital not only as Britain embarked upon a retreat from Empire in the shadow of colonial insurgencies, but

⁷⁰ TNA, CO 537/4750, ‘Personal and Confidential memo from Sir Henry Gurney to Mr Creech-Jones, Colonial Secretary’, 28 February 1949.

⁷¹ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p.510.

⁷² Ibid, p.517.

also in the wider Cold War context as the ‘value of residual Empire’ became apparent.⁷³ Indeed, much of this value was placed upon enduring intelligence networks, particularly in the strategically sensitive region of East Asia. British success in Malaya thus took on a wider significance, in military, political as well as intelligence terms.

Intelligence was always the starting point for every military and police operation, and the majority of this intelligence was gleaned from surrendered enemy personnel. Many SEP were ‘turned’ by the British and placed in the newly created Special Operations Volunteer Force (SOVF), established by Templer in July 1953. Some of these ‘running dogs’ – as ex-communist informers were known – provided on-going advice as to the intentions and tactics of their former colleagues. Some SEP were deployed on lecture tours as part of an orchestrated propaganda campaign in order to display signs of rehabilitation and dissuade other ethnic Chinese from joining the ranks of the MRLA. Far more dangerously, other SEP were returned to their old guerrilla units and planted as agents. This was a high risk strategy, especially given the notoriously brutal MCP internal security units who ran so-called ‘traitor-killing camps’ to eliminate the enemy within.⁷⁴ Significant cash payments and the threat of execution were usually enough to turn a SEP from an informant into an agent, coercively fostering what Tim Harper has labelled ‘a confessional kind of politics’⁷⁵ that epitomised the life and death bargaining so symptomatic in counter-insurgencies. By May 1954 there were twelve SOVF

⁷³ Richard J. Aldrich, ‘The Value of Residual Empire: Anglo-American Intelligence Co-operation in Asia after 1945’, in Richard J. Aldrich and Michael F. Hopkins (ed.), *Intelligence, Defence and Diplomacy: British Policy in the Post-War World* (London: Frank Cass, 1994), p.226.

⁷⁴ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p.509.

⁷⁵ Harper, *The End of the Empire*, p.164.

platoons, totalling nearly 300 men, who had managed to kill twelve insurgents and prove their worth as a source of intelligence and assassination. When questioned about the military discipline of SOVF units, General Templer retorted: 'To hell with drill. We want them to handle weapons and lay ambushes.'⁷⁶ As the tide turned against the MRLA the number of SEP offering aid to the British increased to a peak of forty a month by 1957.⁷⁷ The one thing more useful than a dead insurgent was one willing to switch sides. As head of Special Branch Guy Madoc succinctly stated: 'Defeating the Emergency depended on intelligence.'⁷⁸ This dependence was complimented to a large extent by the attempted employment of politicised 'hearts and minds' operations, which was as much a coercive process as it was a conciliatory one.

'Hearts and Minds' and Propaganda

It is eminently more practical in a counter-insurgency to encourage the guerrillas to surrender their arms and divulge information simply than to kill them. That is why the psychological battle against the insurgents and the 'hearts and minds' campaign conducted towards the wider population to steer them away from insurgent propaganda was as important as the military and intelligence battle. The biggest difficulty in this respect was persuading the ethnic Chinese that their interests were best provided by an independent Malaya rather than a communist state. This must be seen in several contexts: firstly, the recent and rapid independence granted to India and Burma; and secondly, the establishment of the People's Republic of China and the official

⁷⁶ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, p.100.

⁷⁷ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p.513.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, p.93.

recognition this communist government received from the British in January 1950. The impact of this last factor will be discussed in relation to its effect on the insurgents later. However, it certainly made the wording of anti-communist propaganda a more delicate process thereafter. According to Susan Carruthers, the propaganda tactics employed during the Emergency 'reveals much about the British government's determination to manage the presentation of terrorism in a fashion which accorded with its own political objectives.'⁷⁹ To this extent, the authorities had a dual-track approach to propaganda: it must induce insurgents to surrender, and it must dissuade the public from sympathising with, or joining, the insurgents.

One of the earliest propaganda tools was the simple distribution of anti-insurgent leaflets - 50 million in 1949 alone.⁸⁰ The effectiveness of this method is witnessed by the MCP's directive that made it an offence punishable by death for one of their members to so much as pick them up off the jungle floor. In the early stages of the Emergency, propaganda was the responsibility of the Department of Public Relations, which had a staff of 200. However, questions were raised over their approach. Not only were there concerns about the overtly Western style to psychological warfare, but also worries about the emphasis on written pamphlets in a country where low literacy rates were rife among the target rural population. To professionalize the propaganda campaign, Briggs oversaw the creation of the Emergency Information Service (EIS) based in Kuala Lumpur in June 1950 to manage and disseminate propaganda at a federal level. Yet the

⁷⁹ Susan L. Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and Colonial Counter-Insurgency, 1944-1960* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), p.73.

⁸⁰ TNA, CAB 21/1681, 'Cabinet Malaya Committee – MAL.C.(50)22, Information Services and Propaganda in Malaya – Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies', 23 June 1950.

arrival of General Templer in 1952 saw him merge the EIS with other existing propaganda bodies to form the Department of Information in an attempt to rationalise propaganda distribution. Under Alec Peterson (whose 1952 report on the organisation of Information Services in Malaya provided the framework for restructuring⁸¹) the unit initiated a huge increase in the quantity of pamphlets being distributed – 93 million in 1953, rising to over 100 million in 1956.⁸² Clearly, the initial phase of the government's propaganda campaign relied heavily on the printed press. Aside from pamphlet distribution, a key component was utilising the Malayan tradition of newspapers being read aloud in public to maximise the spread of the government's message. This is significant given that in 1951 the government published over five million copies of newspapers or periodicals.⁸³ Yet by the end of that year it became obvious that radio now held a sway over a population reaping the financial dividends of the Korean War boom. Private listener licences leaped from 35,000 in 1949 to 110,800 in 1953, whilst over the same period the number of community receivers installed in resettlement areas rose from 32 to 1,400.⁸⁴ Radio could reach those rural communities where the battle for hearts and minds became crucial. Another key tactic in this front of the counter-insurgency campaign was the use of 'voice aircraft', which would fly over the jungle broadcasting messages to the insurgents, urging them to surrender. As the war began to turn against the MRLA after 1952 and morale severely dipped, the effectiveness of this method became obvious. In 1955, questioning revealed that 100 per cent of surrendered enemy personnel stated that they had heard propaganda being broadcast from voice

⁸¹ TNA, CO 967/181, 'A.D.C Peterson's report on Organisation of Information Services in the Federation of Malaya', 20 August 1952.

⁸² Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p.95.

⁸³ Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, p.185.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.186.

aircraft, many of whom agreed that what they heard played a large role in their decision to surrender and offer intelligence.⁸⁵

Inducement of insurgent surrender was also attempted by the implementation of a controversial, yet ultimately successful, rewards policy by the colonial authorities. Monetary payment was offered in order to encourage the divulging of information on insurgent location or future operations. This was not a widely welcomed policy, either politically or militarily. The morality of paying considerable sums of money to ‘turned’ insurgents was raised by police and government officials, in particular after one high profile incident during Operation Cobble in 1956 when a *Min Yuen* member turned police informer, leading to the ambush and killing of three insurgents – information for which the informer was paid M\$12,000, seventeen times the average annual Malayan income.⁸⁶ Initiated by Hugh Carleton-Greene, head of the Emergency Information Service (EIS), and significantly expanded by General Templer, the rewards policy had constituted a sliding scale of payments for information depending upon the rank of the insurgent captured or killed – ranging from M\$2,000 for a rank and file insurgent up to M\$60,000 for Chin Peng, the Secretary-General of the MCP.⁸⁷ By June 1952 the policy had distributed M\$2million in reward money, with a tangible number of people coming forward with information, leading to direct operational results. As Kumar Ramakrishna

⁸⁵ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, p.95.

⁸⁶ Kumar Ramakrishna, ‘Bribing the Reds to Give Up’: Rewards Policy in the Malayan Emergency’, *War in History*, Vol.9 No.3 (2002), p.333.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.340.

concludes, the rewards policy was ‘a psywar [psychological warfare] weapon of considerable potency’ even if it was ‘a most moral expedient.’⁸⁸

It had been argued in some quarters that the ‘hearts and minds’ strategy operating in Malaya was not a conscious and deliberate move by the political and military authorities, but a strategy that ‘evolved slowly and gradually out of the basic good nature of the soldiers involved.’⁸⁹ Such claims point, for example, to the unprompted medical treatment captured insurgents would receive from British troops and the dividends it would produce in terms of their consequent compliance and willingness to surrender information. This ‘benevolence argument’, however, is undone by firstly assuming that the British counter-insurgency campaign rested on gentlemanly conduct, and secondly for failing to take into account that for every one insurgent who received medical treatment there were far more CTs and non-CTs galvanised by their experiences through forcible resettlement or detention without trial. A politically-motivated and instigated ‘hearts and minds’ propaganda campaign had to be initiated from the top down in order to assuage some of the side-effects of other counter-insurgency tactics. To this extent, as Richard Stubbs rightly points out, the British adoption of both a ‘coercion and enforcement’ strategy and a ‘hearts and minds’ strategy ‘should not be considered in terms of a dichotomy but rather as two poles of a continuum.’⁹⁰ Both were essential in ‘cajoling’ sympathisers into becoming informers whilst also inducing guerrillas to surrender. The two approaches provided a carrot and stick to British strategy, which

⁸⁸ Ibid, pp.351-52.

⁸⁹ Ken Connor, *Ghost Force: The Secret History of the SAS* (London: Cassell, 1998), p.43.

⁹⁰ Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, p.264.

would come to have a profound effect on the MRLA and the indigenous Malaysians. It would simply be too introspective to assert eventual victory over the MCP solely to the actions of the British military, political and intelligence communities alone. Their strategy was vital in contributing towards victory, however there were further external factors that must be taken into account if the insurgent defeat is to be fully and adequately explained. This helps fend off what has been a historiographical tendency to lay the credit for victory at the feet of certain British individuals, such as Templer or Briggs, without acknowledging that their initiatives only had the impact they did due to external factors such as the level of MCP support within the indigenous Malaysian population, the external level of funding and solidarity the MCP was receiving; their organisational structure; and the particular Maoist rural guerrilla strategy they adopted.

MRLA Organisation

The Malayan Races Liberation Army was organised in a classic Maoist manner, constitutive of two main strands – the MRLA jungle-bound fighting force and its support and supply wing, the *Min Yuen* (People's Movement).⁹¹ When the Emergency broke out in 1948 around 9,000 communists were associated with the insurgency. Up to 3,000 guerrillas took to the jungles to undertake attacks, ambushes and training, whilst the remainder served in a support capacity on the periphery of the jungle in order to fund, feed and arm the uprising.

⁹¹ Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, p.33.

Nominally led by Chin Peng, leader of the Malayan Communist Party, the initial incarnation of the insurgent movement, the Malayan People's Anti-British Army was organised into eight regiments. Yet after initial operational difficulties the MPABA retreated to the jungle to undergo a period of reorganisation and training. The group emerged as the MRLA in 1949 as a far more decentralised insurgent group, now based primarily upon semi-autonomous units of around fifty insurgents who were responsible for undertaking attacks within their particular rural area.⁹² Aside from the organisational changes wrought by the 1948-49 rejuvenation, perhaps the more significant implication was its eventually enhanced tactical potency.

MRLA Strategy and Tactics

It took the MRLA nearly a year after their re-emergence from the jungle in 1948-49 to assess their guerrilla tactics. A directive captured by the authorities revealed that in June 1949 the insurgents had decided to concentrate two-thirds of their entire force over three areas in northern Malaya, with the remaining third allowed to form quasi-autonomous ten-man 'killer squads', roaming across the south of the country.⁹³ British security forces adopted their own tactics and troop deployments accordingly. However, one of the main strategic failings of the MRLA at this point was that it placed too much emphasis on terrorism at the expense of propaganda and political education. Consequently, they

⁹² Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, p.64.

⁹³ Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, p.500.

failed to cultivate a wide base of ideological loyalty even among the Chinese demographic.

By late 1951 the initial impetus given to the MCP by Mao Zedong's rise to power in a communist revolution in China had almost irretrievably slipped away. Another strategic revision had to be undertaken. Despite the chance assassination of the High Commissioner Sir Henry Gurney in October 1951, the MCP issued what would be known as the October Directives, which demonstrate an appreciation on behalf of the party hierarchy that victory would not be possible given previous strategy. The Directives subordinated military operations in favour of aggressive political activity amongst members that attempted to be inclusive of non-Chinese ethnicities. In short, it attempted to 'expand and consolidate the mass organisations' to compliment their acts of terrorism.⁹⁴ Yet it seemed too little too late. The accumulative effect of Briggs' resettlement programme, the impact of heightened British propaganda and Templer's effective organisational restructuring had taken the initiative away from the MCP. Thus perhaps the one factor that negated the slow and inept British response was the equally inept insurgency the MCP was attempting to prosecute. By the spring of 1953, Chin Peng relocated the command of the MRLA over the Thailand border in a move that tacitly acknowledged that the insurgency was crumbling.

⁹⁴ An English translation of the October Directives, made by the intelligence services in Malaya, can be found in the TNA, CO 1022/187, 'Captured Malayan Communist Party Documents'.

A critical explanation for this turning tide arguably is the MRLAs 'misapplication' of guerrilla strategy. In eagerly applying a Maoist approach to Malaya, the MCP misguidedly 'saw the Malayan situation as analogous to the Chinese. Further, the MCP ignored or misread Mao's caution that "revolution must follow local laws and conditions to be successful."' ⁹⁵ Undoubtedly, the ethnic divide in Malaya made it even more difficult for the MCP to promulgate ideological revolution along Chinese lines, and this makes it even more unfathomable that, as the tide turned against them and their strategic short-comings became obvious, they did not abandon Mao's rural revolutionary maxim of using the villages to surround the towns and launch a renewed urban insurgency. Malaya had one of the highest levels of urbanisation in any South East Asian country ⁹⁶, and there were lax levels of security at government offices in Kuala Lumpur. Furthermore, Chinese-Malayans – the backbone of the MCP – were the majority ethnic group in ten of Malaya's fifteen largest cities, housing 43 per cent of Malaya's entire Chinese population. ⁹⁷ An urban campaign would certainly have caused more political and economic disruption for the British and further stretched the under-resourced military, however, the MCP had become so obsessed with mere survival that it failed to implement an effective strategic overhaul or undergo tactical innovation. The need to survive, as Sam Sarkesian points out, 'forced the MCP and its armed elements deeper into the jungle, where they became increasingly vulnerable to British military operations.' ⁹⁸ And at this point, the internal meets the external. The MCPs lack of support from an external benefactor, such as China or the USSR (as shall be shown

⁹⁵ Sarkesian, *Unconventional Conflicts in a New Security Era*, p.66.

⁹⁶ Between 1947 and 1957 the urban population rose from 26.5% to 42.3% of the total population. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, p.214.

⁹⁷ Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency*, p.43.

⁹⁸ Sarkesian, *Unconventional Conflicts in a New Security Era*, p.174.

later) combined with a lack of grounding within the indigenous population and a failure to adopt strategy to the political and military situation played directly into the hands of the British. As a consequence, a inept insurgent opponent explains the outcome of the Malayan conflict as much as eventual British tactical measures.

Internal Support for the MRLA

The communist insurgency in Malaya was not a popular uprising. The lack of sizeable internal support for the MRLA can be explained firstly, by their lack of financial resources to harness the use of mass publication leaflets or radio transmitters, and secondly, and perhaps most crucially, because their political base was restricted, for ethnic and political reasons, to a small percentile of the entire Malayan population. Simply, they lacked popular support. The ideological roots of the MCP's insurgency were not based on widespread national disgruntlement with colonial rule, with high unemployment, or ethnic tensions. In short, the MCP's insurgency demonstrates, as a general rule-of-thumb, that a narrow, dogmatic political insurgency not immersed in common grievance is doomed to be restricted to minimum internal support and face the full backlash of the native majority. As Phillip Deery has noted, by the time the Emergency was declared, 'the MCP was losing its grassroots support in urban areas

largely because of the assault on its key “front” organisations by the colonial authorities... The party’s strength in rural areas... was limited and undependable.’⁹⁹

Specific to the Malayan case, it is also important to remember that another factor restricting the expansion of MCP popular support was that the majority of Malaysians were Muslim who found offence in the atheist tenets of communism. Furthermore, as Richard Stubbs acknowledges, in the context of the Korean War boom as Malayan tin and rubber became essential to the war effort there, ‘trying to organise a revolution is not easy in times of full employment’.¹⁰⁰ There was no financial incentive for non-communist Malays to support the insurgency. Holistically, therefore, what emerges is an insurgency critically under-supported within the boundaries of the territory it aimed to control. It was to find little recompense in external support either.

External Support for the MRLA

Initial British suspicions fell upon the Soviet Union as being behind a Southeast Asian conspiracy to instigate communist revolutions, including within Malaya. The basis of this view stemmed from the MCP’s involvement in the Calcutta Youth Conference for international communist parties in February 1948 where the Cominform purportedly instructed the MCP to initiate an insurgency. Yet this interpretation is based on

⁹⁹ Phillip Deery, ‘Malaya 1948: Britain’s Asian Cold War?’ *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol.9 No.1 (2007), p.45.

¹⁰⁰ Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds*, p.126.

circumstantial evidence and fails to take into account the internal status and deliberations of the MCP itself. Furthermore, the international communist conspiracy argument does not take into account Chin Peng's attempts to prevent the disintegration of the MCP in the wake of the revelation that his predecessor, Loi Tek, had been a British agent.¹⁰¹ If the Soviet Union had instigated the insurgency it remains odd that no Soviet arms, funding or military-political personnel were sent to ensure success. This would have almost certainly been an imperative, especially if the USSR wanted to ensure that a future communist Malaya fell under their influence and not, after 1949, that of Mao's China. It also fails to take into account the anti-colonial element. The MCP, like other anti-colonial insurgent groups, would likely have been influenced by India and Burma's recent independence from Britain. The metropole was not invincible.

With no Soviet arms, the MRLA received no other sources of external support either. Significantly, there was no input from the Chinese Communist Party, before or after Mao's victory in the civil war. In late 1949 even the CIA was forced to admit that they had 'no evidence of material support from the Chinese Communist Party', referring only to CCP 'interest' in the Emergency.¹⁰² This is indicative of the Malayan Communist Party's fringe status in the international communist movement. It carried little weight and attracted little attention. As such, it therefore did not draw a sizeable external support network. This is perhaps one of the most critical disablers of the insurgency. As British counter-insurgency strategy reached a belated level of coherence by the end of

¹⁰¹ Deery, 'Malaya 1948', p.42.

¹⁰² *Declassified Document Reference System* (hereafter *DDRS*), 'Central Intelligence Agency report for the President of the United States: Current Situation in Malaya', 17 November 1949.

General Templer's leadership, the MRLA found itself increasingly isolated with a significantly curtailed ability to remain in contact with the *Min Yuen*, who in turn found it increasingly difficult to come by supplies. The absence of an external sponsor to provide rearmament, financial aid or political protection hindered the MRLA to the extent to which it lost the ability to maintain a level of tactical potency that had so shaken the colonial authorities in the early years. They became more vulnerable to precision jungle patrolling, especially after the introduction of the SAS. External support always supplies oxygen to the lifeblood of an insurgency. Without it, the communist insurgency in Malaya simply suffocated.

The International Dimension

At the outbreak of the Malayan Emergency in 1948 international attention was fixated upon Europe as the nascent Cold War manifested itself across the continent. The Truman Doctrine of 'containment' dominated Western security dialogue as geo-strategic concerns overshadowed a seemingly minor colonial uprising in the corner of a moribund Empire. As the MCP instigated its insurgency in Malaya, the Berlin Blockade heightened superpower tensions; the Soviet's undertook a coup to overthrow the government of Czechoslovakia; the Marshall Plan to revive Europe's economy was divisively promulgating anti-communism across the continent; whilst the Iron Curtain was fast shutting itself between East and West. As a result, events in Southeast Asia were simply not on the strategic radar of the United States in 1948, who, despite the

extant presence of armed communist uprisings in the region, were in Ritchie Ovendale's words 'unwilling to contemplate any major effort... American naivety and selfishness were particularly evident.'¹⁰³ But the Korean War would change that attitude.

The Korean War catalysed American entry into partnership alongside Britain and France in assuming responsibility for the security of Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁴ Military intervention in Korea also crystallised American conceptions of a regional 'domino theory' whereby one communist takeover would trigger its neighbours to fall the same way. Malaya thus became part of the wider American picture of states susceptible to succumb to communism and the Emergency was soon deemed important enough to warrant the State Department's attention. Interestingly, the Americans appear to have been concerned about Malaya in the context not of the MRLA triumphing in its own right but specifically in relation to the way in which the Soviet Union or China could use it as a regional foothold. Indeed, it appears to have been Chinese and not Soviet influence after 1949 that the Americans feared most. As the Director of the Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs Office at the State Department, William S.B. Lacy, enunciated: 'Malaya is likely to be invaded whenever the Chinese feel that they have digested Indo-China and Thailand.'¹⁰⁵ The State Department seemed almost perplexed by the lack of input or interference in Malaya from Moscow: 'With its very large production of gold and with

¹⁰³ Ritchie Ovendale, 'Britain, the United States and the Cold War in South-East Asia, 1949-50', *International Affairs*, Vol.58 No.3 (1982), p.447.

¹⁰⁴ Peter Lowe, 'Change and Stability in Eastern Asia: Nationalism, Communism and British Policy, 1948-1955', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol.15 No.1 (2004), p.141.

¹⁰⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 'Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr George H. Alexander of the Economic Resources and Security Staff. Subject: Political Prospects in Southeast Asia', 4 January 1951, Vol. VI (1951), Asia and the Pacific (Part 1), p.2.

what must be its huge quantities of weapons, it would seem the Soviet Union could do far more than it has done for the Communists in Indo-China, Burma, Malaya, the Philippines, etc.’¹⁰⁶ What emerges, therefore, is the international dimension of the Malayan Emergency being contextualised strongly within a Cold War framework. Latent American anti-colonialism was eclipsed in foreign policy terms by the ubiquity of anti-communism. To the Americans, Malaya was a small piece of a wider game that swung Washington’s support behind the British counter-insurgency campaign and muted criticism of perceived British imperial reassertion (arguments that were in any case nullified when independence for Malaya became a political weapon to undermine the insurgent cause). American acquiescence to the British counter-insurgency efforts removed any significant diplomatic obstacles to the prosecution of the Emergency, allowing a fundamentally colonial campaign to be openly interpreted by Washington as an essential battle against communist expansionism.

Reflections on Malaya

The much-heralded US Army and Marine Corps counter-insurgency field manual FM3-24 praised the British conduct during the Malayan Emergency as a historical campaign that ‘provides lessons applicable to combating any insurgency.’¹⁰⁷ However, as Hew

¹⁰⁶ *FRUS*, ‘Memorandum by Mr Charlton Ogburn to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk)’, 15 January 1951, Vol. VI (1951), Asia and the Pacific (Part 1), p.6.

¹⁰⁷ *FM3-24: US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p.235.

Strachan points out, 'the Americans... more than the British, have held up Malaya as a model.'¹⁰⁸ This chapter has called for a reappraisal of conceptions of Malayan 'success' and attempts to redress the conventional agent-centric historiography of the Malayan Emergency, which concentrates primarily on British figures and fails to account for other factors. British counter-insurgency strategy alone was not enough to 'win' the Malayan campaign. It was successful not solely for its own belatedly discovered merits but also because it favourably interacted with an insurgent group lacking in popular support and without external solidarity. The socio-economic conditions were not ripe enough for the MCP to advance with a widespread revolution, despite the misreading of the situation by the MCP politburo, whose flawed application of Maoist guerrilla strategy played into the hands of the British. Malaya acted as a crucible for British counter-insurgency strategy on a number of levels. It demonstrated that intelligence-gathering networks must be efficient, cohesive and unified. This is essential as the groundwork for military operations, which themselves must be based on an ethos of minimum force, maximum output. Simply, the British did not storm into the jungle all guns blazing. Patience was a military virtue. Politically, Malaya displayed how the process of decolonisation necessitated a stage-managed withdrawal but only at a point when the military battle against the insurgents had been won. As far back as the first pieces of Emergency Legislation in 1948, the campaign in Malaya proved that some things have not changed in the way Britain deals with threats to its national security interest. Detention without trial, the necessity of 'hearts and mind' amongst the local populace, and controversies surrounding abuse by British troops (most notoriously, the

¹⁰⁸ Hew Strachan, 'British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq', *RUSI Journal*, Vol.152 No.6 (2007), p.8.

execution of twenty-four unarmed detainees at Batang Kali on 12 December 1948), have a long heritage, and it is essential to place contemporary debates surrounding these issues in their historical context.¹⁰⁹ Yet the political management of Malaya was insubstantial in the crucial early years. As outgoing Colonial Secretary James Griffiths remarked to his incoming successor Oliver Lyttelton after the 1951 election, Malaya 'has become a military problem to which we (the government) have not been able to find the answer.'¹¹⁰ So despite the slow burning politico-military strategy, what makes Malaya stand out in counter-insurgency terms was the way in which it eventually came to form the basis of future practice. Politically this would be based on close civil-military decision-making by decentralised committees whilst being militarily grounded in the necessity of sub-platoon units in launching localised intelligence-led operations in order to attain greater tactical nuance and operational effectiveness.¹¹¹ By the official end of the MCP uprising in 1960 the blueprint for future British counter-insurgencies had been written. The efficacy of this blueprint, however, remains vastly overstated.

¹⁰⁹ In April 2009, after pressure from victims' families, the British government agreed to open an investigation into the shootings by the Scots Guards at Batang Kali, some sixty years after the events were officially dismissed as legitimate action – *The Independent*, '60 years on Malaya "massacre" by British troops to be investigated', 30 April 2009.

¹¹⁰ Oliver Lyttelton, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos* (London: Bodley Head, 1962), p.362.

¹¹¹ David Ucko, 'Countering Insurgents Through Distributed Operations: Insights from Malaya, 1948-1960', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.30 No.1 (2007), pp.51 & 53.

CHAPTER 4: *The Malayan Roots of Mau Mau: Transferring Counter-Insurgency Lessons, 1952-1960*

As British efforts to stage-manage the retreat from Empire and uphold Cold War military commitments unfolded across south-east Asia in the early 1950s, it is easy to overlook the conflict that Frank Kitson labelled ‘a sideshow amongst sideshows.’¹ Declared four years into operations in Malaya, the Kenyan Emergency utilised counter-insurgency tactics that built upon the lessons learned in the Far East and were applied in the effort to defeat the mysterious movement known as Mau Mau.

The focus of critical analysis in this chapter will be the extent to which strategic and tactical direction in Kenya was based on the developing counter-insurgency campaign in Malaya and the enactment of slowly-imbibed lesson-learning from south-east Asia. The early phases of the Kenyan Emergency lacked coherence and direction. Yet as the belated dividends of General Briggs’ actions and the renewed sense of purpose lent by General Templer in Malaya began to turn the tide for Britain against the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA) after 1952, such strategic and tactical imperatives as forcible resettlement to new villages, detention camps, supply network cut-off, and the use of surrendered enemy personnel as double agents, were implemented by the British authorities in Kenya with clear operational dividends. Kenya, in short, was a slow-burn

¹ Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), p.13.

strategy. Once the British gained strategic clarity in Kenya, largely thanks to lessons from Malaya, the Mau Mau found themselves prosecuting an increasingly isolated insurgency. As in Malaya, eventual British ‘success’ has to be contextualised against the background of a small insurgent movement lacking in overt popular support and any external aid. Intelligence agencies were also slow to react at first, but organisational restructuring witnessed in Malaya also became a model for Kenya, reaping quick rewards by improving the system of intelligence collection and dissemination. The political community, however, were not willing to acknowledge that experiences in Malaya could help counter-insurgency operations in Kenya. Any comparison between the two was discouraged given the political propensity to view Mau Mau as a disorganised, savage rabble that could be easily defeated. Yet propaganda in both insurgencies retained the same themes, namely the delegitimation of the insurgent group by highlighting their atrocities and perceived savagery. As a case study in counter-insurgency lesson-learning, Kenya demonstrates the maladroitness of the British to learn quickly, and typifies just how an eventual counter-insurgency ‘victory’ and belated operational and strategic clarity were able to be realised in large part due to the deficiencies of the insurgent opponent. This case study exhibits how a nascent tendency for slow learning and slow burning that emerged in Malaya became fully established in Kenya and began a linear trend in British counter-insurgency conduct.

Perhaps more than any other insurgent group in British post-war colonial history, the Mau Mau has been subject to rigorous and heated historiographical debate surrounding

its origins, meaning and legacy.² Traditionalist interpretations, primarily encapsulated by the works of Kenyan scholar Louis Leakey during the Emergency itself, depicted Mau Mau as an atavistic cult shrouded in mysticism.³ Yet the 1960s gave rise to a revisionist historiographical trend that shifted interpretation of the group away from tribal primitivism and towards an understanding of a rational and modern uprising fought for national liberation unshackled by previous European ethnocentric analysis.⁴ Since the crest of the revisionist wave broke in the 1960s, Mau Mau has been comparatively under-researched as a source of counter-insurgency analysis, especially in terms of historical and military literature, until the early twenty-first century when a series of books revisiting the Kenyan Emergency offered new critical interpretations of British conduct between 1952 and 1960.⁵ The on-going debate about Mau Mau has given rise to what Bruce Berman has labelled the historiographic ‘paradox of Mau Mau’, where contending schools of thought have common foundation in divergent explanations of the three overarching themes of nationalism, ethnicity and modernity.⁶ Indeed, the dispute over both the continuing implications of the meaning of Mau Mau in Kenyan history and

² For an overview of this debate see E. S. Atieno-Odhiambo, ‘The Production of History in Kenya: The Mau Mau Debate’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol.25 No.2 (1991), pp.300-307; and Joanna Lewis, ‘Nasty, Brutish and in Shorts? British Colonial Rule, Violence and the Historians of Mau Mau’, *The Round Table*, Vol.96 No.389 (2007), pp.201-33.

³ L.S.B Leakey, *Mau Mau and the Kikuyu* (London: Meuthen, 1952); *Defeating Mau Mau* (London: Meuthen, 1954). For another conservative traditionalist account see Fred Majdalany, *State of Emergency: The Full Story of Mau Mau* (London: Longmans, 1962).

⁴ Perhaps the most prominent of the revisionist texts is Carl Rosberg and John Nottingham, *The Myth of Mau Mau: Nationalism in Kenya* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1966). Also see Donald L. Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau From Within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1966).

⁵ The two books at the forefront of this critical approach are David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Orion, 2006) (which focuses upon the summary justice and wonton use of capital punishment for insurgents), and Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Pimlico, 2005) (which focuses upon the conditions and treatment in detention camps).

⁶ Bruce Berman, ‘Nationalism, Ethnicity and Modernity: The Paradox of Mau Mau’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol.25 No.2 (1991), pp.181-206.

British execution of its counter-insurgency campaign were crystallised in October 2006 when a group of surviving Mau Mau veterans launched a lawsuit against the British government demanding an apology for brutal atrocities committed during the Emergency and an out-of-court financial compensation settlement.⁷ Contemporary interest in Mau Mau was further sparked by revelations in late 2008 that the then US President-elect Barack Obama's Kenyan grandfather had been arrested and allegedly tortured by the British for being a suspected Mau Mau member.⁸ Yet in terms of the extrapolated meaning pertaining to counter-insurgency, the Kenyan example has not consistently been placed in the context of lesson learning. If Malaya drew up the counter-insurgency blueprint, Kenya represented the first opportunity to put those plans into action elsewhere. Archive material and elements of existing secondary sources reveal an untapped angle from which to view the British defeat of Mau Mau: namely its strategic, operational and tactical roots in the Malayan Emergency and the delay in producing an effective transferral process.

Origins and Background to the Mau Mau Insurgency

The roots of Mau Mau lie in the Kikuyu tribe – one of forty-two tribes or ethnic groupings in Kenya. The politicisation of the Kikuyu stemmed from severe pressure

⁷ 'Mau Mau to Sue British Government', *BBC News Online*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/5411030.stm>, accessed 23 October 2006.

⁸ *The Times*, 'Beatings and abuse made Barack Obama's grandfather loathe the British', 3 December 2008.

placed on their tribal lands in the 1920s by a parallel occurrence of a marked population increase and the claim to large swathes of Kikuyu land in the central highlands of Kenya by European settlers who employed Kikuyu labour to tend the land as *de facto* tenant farmers. This was to provide a catalyst for militancy within elements of the Kikuyu, who had seen during the early twentieth century their tribal practices and political organisations, namely the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), suppressed and manipulated by the colonial authorities and the missionary churches. For implications further down the line, it also provoked a mass migration of landless and angry Kikuyu from the White Highlands to the urban centre of Nairobi, channelling an influx of radicalised rural sentiment into a new urban environment. As a consequence of these developments, significant segments of the Kikuyu tribe were faced with poverty and unemployment accentuated by a lack of land and over-population.

In 1940 the colonial authorities proscribed the KCA, interpreting it as a challenge to colonial power, forcing those members who had not been arrested underground. Between 1944 and 1946 a successor movement, the Kenya African Union (KAU), emerged, quickly building a membership of over 100,000 under the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta. By instinct a moderate reform movement, schisms soon appeared within the KAU as the radical remnants of the KCA began pressing for more subversive action. The underground KCA leadership subsequently altered its recruitment strategy in order to become a viable mass movement of its own. It was during this organisational shift

that the mysterious group known as Mau Mau first emerged.⁹ This militant and mercurial movement was thought to have been responsible for a number of agitations against colonial rule in the late 1940s and were understood to administer oaths of allegiance to its members (the particulars of which subsequent British propaganda would disseminate in salacious detail.)¹⁰ Their intentions, much like the movement as a whole, remained porous, ensuring that Mau Mau was concomitantly labelled reformist, nationalist, anti-colonial and Kikuyu supremacist. No coherent manifesto was ever expounded, adding to the movement's image as dark and irrational.¹¹ Fearing what they did not quite understand, the proscription of membership to Mau Mau was decreed by the colonial authorities in August 1950.

Yet despite the move to quash the movement by legal manoeuvrings, violence and disruption perpetrated by Mau Mau continued, fuelled by the intransigence of both London and Nairobi to instigate political reform of the almost exclusively European settler representation on Kenya's Legislative Council. Attacks on the homes of European settlers and Kikuyu loyalists were undertaken alongside the symbolic mutilation of their cattle. The Governor of Kenya, Sir Philip Mitchell, only months away from retirement by early 1952, proved unwilling to curtail this spike in rural violence and demonstrated particular obstinacy in refusing to tackle this growing problem. Even the Colonial

⁹ Stephen L. Weigart, *Traditional Religion and Guerrilla Warfare in Modern Africa* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp.22-24.

¹⁰ For an analysis of the role of oaths in creating the myth of Mau Mau see John Lonsdale, 'Mau Maus of the Mind: Making Mau Mau and Remaking Kenya', *Journal of African History*, Vol.31 No.3 (1990), pp.393-421.

¹¹ For a comprehensive political, social and economic contextualisation of Mau Mau and the creation of its 'myth' see D.W Throup, 'The Origins of Mau Mau', *African Affairs*, Vol.84 No.336 (July 1985), pp.399-433; and Dane Kennedy, 'Constructing the Colonial Myth of Mau Mau', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol.25 No.2 (1992), pp.241-260.

Secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, in a telegram to the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, a month before the Emergency was declared, announced that he ‘did not take a very alarmist view of the situation in Kenya.’¹² Mitchell left his post in June 1952, as the emergence of a nascent insurgency fomented. Astonishingly, Mitchell’s departure triggered a four month interregnum before London posted a new Governor to Kenya, Sir Evelyn Baring, in October.¹³ Upon arrival Baring quickly acknowledged the danger of the situation, citing the existence of a ‘planned revolutionary movement’¹⁴, and in an attempt to curb the mounting levels of rural violence and urban disquiet he declared a State of Emergency on 20 October 1952. It was to mark the beginning of a counter-insurgency campaign that received relatively little public attention in Britain, yet was to demonstrate a military attempt at transferring asymmetric lessons from other theatres of operations, often with a decidedly un-nuanced level of force.

The Political Response to Mau Mau

Within twenty-five days of Governor Baring declaring a State of Emergency up to 8,000 arrests had been made in a massive military and police operation codenamed Jock

¹² The National Archives (hereafter TNA), Kew, London, PREM 11/472, ‘Telegram from Secretary of State for the Colonies, O.Lyttelton to PM, 9 September 1952.’

¹³ This gap was, in part, caused by Baring having nearly amputated his hand in a tree-chopping accident at his home on the eve of his planned departure for Kenya, resulting in a delay of several months.

¹⁴ TNA, CO 822/444, ‘Top Secret: Letter from Sir Evelyn Baring to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Rt. Hon. Oliver Lyttelton, 9 October 1952.’

Scott.¹⁵ This represented an attempt to decapitate the KAU and the KCA in a direct effort to stifle the momentum of Mau Mau. A further crackdown on the wider trade union and nationalist movement was also instigated in a political endeavour to cripple any solidarity from groups perceived to have sympathies with Mau Mau's seemingly anti-colonial strategy. Yet as an antithesis to the interpretation of the Emergency as a *consequence* of Mau Mau violence, revisionist arguments, notably from Donald Barnett, posit that it was in fact a *cause* of escalated militancy. Barnett contends that the move to outlaw the affiliations of large swathes of both the Kikuyu and wider nationalist population alienated a far greater degree of Kenyans than before the Emergency.¹⁶ The fact that the colonial authorities estimated that up to ninety percent of the Kikuyu population of 1.5 million had taken at least one of the seven stages of Mau Mau oaths can aid an understanding of the draconian, catch-all detention policy. Yet this estimate was exaggerated and led to an unsubtle political approach in distinguishing the insurgents from the ethnic community from which they emanated.¹⁷ The political element of the counter-insurgency strategy was therefore flawed from the outset.

Yet the political response to Mau Mau cannot be reduced to reference to imperial reassertion. There were numerous, often competing, interests and influences that intertwined during the Emergency, namely that of the European settlers, the Kikuyu 'loyalists', the colonial authorities, and the British government itself. It is from the interaction of these interests that emerged the political reaction to the Mau Mau

¹⁵ John Newsinger, 'Minimum Force, British Counter-Insurgency and the Mau Mau Rebellion', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.3 No.1 (Spring 1992), p.48.

¹⁶ Barnett, *Mau Mau From Within*, p.72.

¹⁷ Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*, p.27.

insurgency.¹⁸ There does appear to have been a distinct disparity between the attitudes and inclinations of the colonial authorities in Kenya and the political officials at Westminster. The colonial response at the declaration of the State of Emergency had been to significantly increase the sentences for apparent misdemeanours or perceived Mau Mau-inspired crimes and instigate collective punishment. However, as David Anderson points out, ‘Churchill was not impressed by the “special pleading” from Nairobi for this or that power... Lyttelton (Colonial Secretary), too, thought that the latest proposals smacked of heavy handedness, even of vengeance and retribution.’¹⁹ Yet as the Emergency unfolded the Kenyan campaign weighed little on the mind of Prime Minister Churchill, with most political direction in London emanating from Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton.²⁰ Despite the activism in the face of stories of British brutality (see the next section on the military response) by the trio of Labour MPs Barbara Castle, Fenner Brockway and Leslie Hale, even on the opposition benches ‘no one in the leadership of the party really wanted to rock the boat over Mau Mau...’²¹ Counter-insurgency in Kenya was simply unwarranted of political attention in London, dismissed as an uprising by local savages, easy to put down, and thus crystallising Kitson’s interpretation of Mau Mau as a ‘sideshow’ in the grander scheme of 1950s British foreign and defence policy. Yet as an example of counter-insurgency lesson-learning, and as an illustration of how often the most interesting illuminations on a topic

¹⁸ Bruce Berman, ‘Bureaucracy and Incumbent Violence: Colonial Administration and the Origins of the ‘Mau Mau’ Emergency’, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol.6 No.2 (April 1976), p146-47.

¹⁹ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p.71.

²⁰ Analysis of the main files at the National Archives dealing with Whitehall’s response to Mau Mau reveals management lay with the Colonial Office. Especially see series CO 822.

²¹ Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag*, p.309.

appear when light is shone in the darkest corners, Kenya needs to be placed under the scrutiny of the historical microscope.

The colonial authorities' depiction in both Nairobi and London of Mau Mau as primeval savages enabled them, in Bruce Berman's words, 'to fight a nasty guerrilla war with good conscience.'²² This illustration of the insurgent enemy was cemented by a carefully constructed political propaganda campaign. The campaign within Kenya itself resorted firstly to outright censorship, banning a long list of publications including the communist *Daily Worker*, and then secondly to more 'positive' forms of propaganda designed to further the political and military ends of the counter-insurgency campaign. This type of propaganda, as in Malaya, derived from a multiplicity of requirements, including the mutual need to delegitimise the insurgent cause whilst stemming the flow of sympathisers to the forests and placating the fears of the settler community.²³ As in Malaya, this final task of ensuring settler compliance was often undermined by mistrust and a feeling on their behalf that 'outsiders' from London did not understand the mentality or behaviour of the 'natives'. The settler-government relationship was not eased by the prospect of Kenyan independence (discussed in full detail below.) These difficulties were further exacerbated by a Kenyan Information Service in a 'state of neglect and disorder.'²⁴ Propaganda was the vague responsibility of a disparate number of agencies with no centralised control or message. It took until February 1953 for the

²² Berman, 'The Paradox of Mau Mau', p.192.

²³ Susan L. Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and Colonial Counter-Insurgency, 1944-1960* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), p.146.

²⁴ Ibid, p.150.

Kenyan and British authorities to appoint a unifying Director of Information, Brigadier William Gibson.

Whitehall's propagandists were eager to ensure that the Kenyan Emergency was not depicted as a carbon copy of the Malayan Emergency. They were concerned by late 1952, four years into operations in Malaya, that any comparisons with what were perceived at that time to be a stalled and protracted campaign against a porous enemy were counter-productive. A.C.E. Malcolm, the Head of the Information Policy Department (IPD), was keen that propaganda material should 'substantiate the thesis that Kenya is not, repeat not, going to develop into "another Malaya"... On the face of it there is altogether too much similarity for the propagandists' convenience.'²⁵ Such a view, however, must be placed in the context of a pre-Templer strategic vision in Malaya, when Whitehall disgruntlement at progress in the colony was voluminous. The Director of the Information Service, Charles Carstairs, duly attempted to highlight the *de facto* Kikuyu civil war unfolding given the high number of loyalist Kikuyu Home Guard units and the mainly African victims of Mau Mau violence. Yet, as Susan Carruthers rightly observes, such an emphasis would, counter-intuitively, ensure that:

'the basic themes of propaganda on Mau Mau were identical to those on Malaya: that the victims of terrorism were of the same ethnicity as the terrorists; that the terrorists did not enjoy external support, nor were they

²⁵ TNA, CO 1027/7, 'Letter from A.C.E. Malcolm to C.Y. Carstairs, 22 November 1952.

a legitimate nationalist movement; and that Britain was doing much to promote the social and political advancement of the colonial inhabitants.’²⁶

Again learning from their Malayan experience, propaganda was quick to delegitimise the Mau Mau by labelling them ‘terrorists’ in public discourse and by playing heavily upon imagery of Mau Mau barbarism and depictions of a movement driven by atavistic savagery fundamentally incapable of engaging with the ‘civilising’ process of colonisation. However, the issue of civility cannot exclusively be levelled at Mau Mau given the politicised process of detention, ‘rehabilitation’, and resettlement initiated by the colonial authorities.

In July 1953 the Kenyan government initiated a programme of rehabilitation for former or captured Mau Mau. This process, informally dubbed ‘the Pipeline’, was put in place at some 100 detention camps for suspects, which by the end of the Emergency in 1960 had seen some 80,000 Kikuyu men and women pass through their barbed wire gates. This reformatory programme was designed to convert the perceivably warped Mau Mau into progressive Kenyan citizens via a combination of re-education, Christian teaching, and manual labour.²⁷ This official process was often interspersed with unofficial ‘cleansing ceremonies’ whereby the authorities attempted to purge the influence of

²⁶ Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p.156.

²⁷ Caroline Elkins, ‘The Struggle for Mau Mau Rehabilitation in Late Colonial Kenya’, *International Journal of African and International Studies*, Vol.33 No.1 (2000), pp.25-26.

mystic seers and the Mau Mau oaths from the detainees in rituals carried out by Kikuyu elders nicknamed 'Her Majesty's Witchdoctors'.²⁸ Yet the scale of detention in Kenya was drastically out of proportion to what was witnessed in Malaya. By 1954 there were some 64,000 detainees awaiting interrogation, compared to a maximum of just 1,200 at the height of the Malayan Emergency.²⁹ This politicised process of detention placed a massive strain on the intelligence agencies, especially the police Special Branch, to screen those who were interned in the camps. The fate of many detainees lay in the hands of Kikuyu *gikunia* – loyalist informants who were paraded in front of lined-up suspects covered head-to-toe in sack cloth with small eye slits in order to anonymously identify supposed Mau Mau.

In the months preceding the official rehabilitation policy announcement the colonial authorities in Kenya sought guidance on its formulation. Governor Baring turned to General Templer for assistance. The Malayan experience had already provided Kenya with the template for its Emergency Regulations for detained persons (the Emergency [Detained Persons] Regulations of 1952 and 1953 were lifted from Malaya's Emergency [Detained Persons] Regulations of 1948).³⁰ In June 1953 Baring requested the dispatch of an officer from Malaya to advise on Kenyan rehabilitation policy vis-à-vis Mau Mau detainees. Templer, already stretched with manpower in Malaya, eventually agreed to train Thomas Askwith, the Commissioner for Community Development in Kenya, who

²⁸ Weigart, *Traditional Religion and Guerrilla Warfare in Modern Africa*, p.30.

²⁹ Randall Heather, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in Kenya, 1952-56', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.5 No.3 (1990), p.71.

³⁰ Elkins, 'Mau Mau Rehabilitation', p.32, fn.27. Also see Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*, pp.101-06.

was sent to Malaya in August 1953.³¹ Askwith, perhaps the foremost colonial expert on Kenyan impoverishment with a liberal paternalist zeal for reform, toured Malayan detention camps and rehabilitation centres and was briefed by Templer on the Malayan approach. Askwith's recommendations on the back of this visit were to provide the substance of Kenya's official rehabilitation policy, notably the emphasis on re-education not punishment and on a clear distinction in treatment towards insurgent sympathisers and insurgent fighters.³² However, it is clear from first-hand accounts³³ and from recent in-depth historical research³⁴ that such a distinction was arbitrary.

Yet it is not just in the rehabilitation process that controversy lies. The application of an extensive resettlement programme drastically overshadowed the scope of a similar process undertaken in Malaya. Between June 1954 and October 1955 over 1 million Kikuyu were forcibly resettled into 854 new villages. As in Malaya, this programme was designed to disrupt the activities of the insurgent supply network by placing vulnerable communities on the forest fringe under closer scrutiny and monitoring. Although ostensibly modelled on the Malayan version (which themselves were not without their critics or controversial moments), the Kenyan villages were, as David Anderson has argued, 'little more than concentration camps to punish Mau Mau sympathisers.'³⁵ The land rights and farming opportunities offered to the resettled Malaysians were not extended to their Kenyan counter-parts.

³¹ For the official correspondence pertaining to this visit see TNA, CO 822/703.

³² Elkins, 'Mau Mau Rehabilitation', pp.32-34.

³³ Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, *Mau Mau Detainee* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964).

³⁴ Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*.

³⁵ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p.294.

So what about the much vaunted British approach to winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of indigenous populations in counter-insurgency campaigns? In Kenya such an approach was severely lacking, perhaps the one major signature approach in Malaya neglected upon transfer. Any remnants of a ‘hearts and minds’ strategy in Kenya focussed primarily on the ‘minds’ of Mau Mau detainees through forced rehabilitation programmes and cleansing rituals. The only perceivable ‘carrot’ identifiable in the political suppression of Mau Mau lay with a £7 million development and reconstruction programme designed to fund schemes involving road, hospital, school, housing and well construction projects. Perhaps the most important distribution of this money was an additional £5 million allocation for agricultural improvement schemes, aimed to alleviate one of the primary grievances of the Kikuyu.³⁶ However, the benefits of this scheme seem to have been dwarfed by the degenerate effects of several factors. Firstly, the detention and rehabilitation process was mired with widespread ill-regard for detainees’ welfare. This undoubtedly acted as a radicalising catalyst for the relatives and friends of those interned. Secondly, the absence of impartial jurisprudence renders the politico-legal effort to counter Mau Mau callously brutal. Between 1952 and 1958 up to 3,000 Mau Mau suspects stood trial on charges relating to the insurgency. Of these, one third of the suspects, some 1,090, would be hanged after being found guilty. In David Anderson’s words: ‘In no other place, and at no other time, was state execution used on such a scale as this.’³⁷ This leads to a third assumption, namely that the traditional

³⁶ David A. Percox, ‘British Counter Insurgency in Kenya, 1952-56: Extension of Internal Security Policy or Prelude to Decolonisation?’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.9 No.3 (1998), p.65.

³⁷ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, pp.6-7.

colonial master-subject relationship that had been approached arguably with a degree of paternal respect in Malaya, was conducted in Kenya with subjugation and belittlement. Whereas alternative political avenues were sought for the ethnic Chinese in Malaya, no serious effort was made to co-opt non-Mau Mau Kikuyu voices into the political process. This can only lend itself to the conclusion that Africa represented something different in the mindset of the British political class. Psychological assumptions regarding the ‘civilising process’ were not part of the mainstream discourse in Malaya, nor indeed in subsequent counter-insurgency campaigns in Cyprus (on-going during the Mau Mau uprising) or Yemen. This assumption therefore goes some way to explaining how the military repression of Mau Mau was British counter-insurgency implemented with an iron fist.

The Military Response to Mau Mau

The initial military bulwark against the Mau Mau insurgency consisted of just three battalions of the King’s African Rifles, with manpower equivalent to just a third of estimated Mau Mau numbers. Governor Baring, wary of the inadequate military resources at his disposal, requested to London that a military Director of Operations, akin to the Malayan version of Briggs and then Templer, be appointed in Kenya to direct

and supplement the military campaign.³⁸ The Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), General Sir John Harding, initially refused, yet by January 1953, as the insurgency took a hold, he partially relented and Major-General William Hinde was appointed Chief Staff Officer to His Excellency the Governor. Hinde maintained an emphasis on policing in order to uphold law and order, with the military only fulfilling an auxiliary role. Yet he maintained this approach even as Mau Mau violence continued to escalate – a problem compounded by poor intelligence and an as-yet unclear counter-insurgency strategy. In the face of claims of Hinde's lacklustre approach to the campaign, the CIGS himself intervened in 1953 to increase British military strength in Kenya by two brigades and two additional battalions³⁹ (including a battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers and later on a battalion of the Black Watch), bringing the military presence to some 10,000 troops, who were backed up by 20,000 Kenyan police officers and a further 20,000 Kikuyu Home Guard.⁴⁰ Criticism of Hinde's handling of the campaign, especially from the white settler community who felt exposed to increased violence by his intransigence, reached a crescendo in spring 1953 and he was replaced by Lt-General Sir George Erskine in May. Erskine's appointment signifies the moment at which the British started to take the Mau Mau insurgency seriously, reflected in the decision to upgrade Erskine's role to General Officer Command (GOC) East Africa Command.

³⁸ See the correspondence in TNA, WO 216/560.

³⁹ TNA, PREM 11/472, 'Cabinet Defence Committee, Kenya: Report by the Chiefs of Staff, 27 February 1953.

⁴⁰ Weigart, *Traditional Religion and Guerrilla Warfare in Modern Africa*, p.31.

Erskine's appointment also reversed the previous military tendency to have ignored the emergent successful lessons of the Malayan campaign. As Thomas Mockaitis has argued, Erskine's arrival saw military operations in Kenya take on a distinctly Malayan hue, including the reduced use (if not total abandonment) of large-scale sweeps through the forest, an increase in police resources, and a heightened level of civil-military co-operation.⁴¹ Indeed, the most overt display of Malayan military lessons percolating the Kenyan campaign was the publication of the 1954 'Handbook of Anti-Mau Mau Operations', distributed to officers in Kenya (although, again, it must be noted that this came two years into the campaign – a crucial time lag given the proliferation of Mau Mau violence since 1952). This manual borrowed the wording and the operational premise of its Malayan precursor, the 'Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya (ATOM) Manual', and represents a clear intention to deliberately transfer the tactical and operational lessons from Malaya to Kenya.⁴² Indeed, Erskine sent a telegram to the Commander-in-Chief of the Far East Land Force acknowledging that the ATOM Manual 'has been much used as a basis for trg [training] in anti-Mau Mau ops. All available copies have been passed to the units concerned...' He goes on to request that: 'if it is still the current "bible" it would be appreciated if more copies could be fwd [forwarded].'⁴³

⁴¹ Thomas Mockaitis, 'The Origins of British Counter-Insurgency', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.1 No.3 (December 1990), pp.222-23.

⁴² Ian F.W. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and Their Opponents Since 1750* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), p.103.

⁴³ TNA, WO 276/159, 'Telegram from GHQ East Africa to GHQ Far East Land Forces, 11 August 1953'.

However, there was a severe disjuncture between the theory and the practice of Malayan lessons in the Kenyan case. Firstly, military operations in Kenya were carried out on a scale not seen in Malaya, undertaken in both urban and rural environments – a scenario not borne out in Malaya. Secondly, there is widespread evidence that the seemingly sacrosanct Malayan imperative of ‘minimum force’ in counter-insurgency was not merely ignored but was flagrantly flouted. In sum, as one observer has noted, the authorities in Kenya ‘imported the Malayan model wholesale... without the sensitivity or restraint.’⁴⁴

Firstly, let us deal with the concomitant undertaking of urban and rural operations. The presence of a radicalised and organised urban segment of the insurgency contrasted with the reified groupings that took to the forests. The threat posed by the Central Committee in the capital Nairobi, the perceived executive body of Mau Mau, drove the colonial military and political authorities to instigate a large and ruthless urban operation to neuter Mau Mau’s urban potency. Operation Anvil was the largest urban cordon-and-search operation ever undertaken by the British military up to that point.⁴⁵ On 24 April 1954, 25,000 troops and police officers sealed off the entire city of Nairobi, rounded up, and screened the city’s entire African population of 30,000 in holding centres in order to detain suspected Mau Mau sympathisers and activists. 16,538 were detained for further questioning after initial screening and 2,416 were deported to the Reserves.⁴⁶ The effects

⁴⁴ Wade Merkel, ‘Draining the Swamp: The British Strategy of Population Control’, *Parameters*, Vol. 36 (Spring 2006), p.41.

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p.200.

⁴⁶ TNA WO, 236/18, ‘The Kenya Emergency, June 1953-May 1955: A Report by General Sir George Erskine’.

of Operation Anvil were two-fold. On a social and ethnic level the indiscriminate nature of the round-up conveyed how unsubtle the British approach to the various African ethnic groupings was. The British had demonstrably failed to distinguish Mau Mau from the wider population who did not support their insurgency, and consequentially displayed an arrogance that could have endangered that widespread apathy towards Mau Mau by mounting such a forceful catchall operation. However, the strategic dividend of the operation was sizeable. It crippled Mau Mau's organisational capabilities in Nairobi, their only urban base, and severed the ability of the urban Mau Mau to supply or influence the rural campaign. Yet it came at the price of alienating large swathes of the originally anti-insurgent indigenous population. The un-nuanced nature of Operation Anvil, the first major post-war urban counter-insurgency operation undertaken by the British Army, puts future urban operations conducted in Yemen and particularly Northern Ireland into context and helps develop a lineage for the British approach to urban campaigning in a low-intensity conflict environment that stretches into recent operations in Basra and southern Iraq.

The rural campaign proved to be equally slow in reaching a level of operations effectiveness. Small scale sweeps through the forest and foothills of Mount Kenya typified the rural military approach in the early years of the Emergency. It was not until 1955, three years into the campaign, that the first major rural operation, Operation Hammer (complementing the urban 'Anvil'), increased the impetus of the campaign in

the forest area.⁴⁷ Capitalising on the improved road infrastructure into the Aberdare mountains, British commanders led 10,000 troops through the forest region in a massive show of rural force with the aim of detaining up to 2,000 suspected Mau Mau insurgents hiding there. The operation lasted little over a month and resulted in just 161 insurgents killed, captured or surrendered, forcing General Erskine to damn the operation with faint praise: 'I did not expect spectacular terrorist casualties, neither were they achieved.'⁴⁸ Deemed a disappointment on an operational level, the military attempted to reinvigorate the rural campaign with Operation First Flute. Using a similar number of troops to Hammer, First Flute was conceived to engage a 3,000-strong insurgent grouping in the wider Mount Kenya area. By April 1955, two months into the operation, just 277 Mau Mau had been killed or taken prisoner – a figure Erskine claimed constituted 15-20 per cent of insurgents thought to be operating in the south and south-west region of Kikuyuland.⁴⁹ Yet perhaps one of the most pertinent lessons of rural operations in Malaya that was not heeded in Kenya was that contact with insurgents takes time, patience and endurance. Calling off operations that initially appear to be reaping little reward, as happened in Kenya, as opposed to the acceptance of operational longevity in Malaya, can arguably be put down to the colonial interpretation of Mau Mau as an atavistic irritant and not a well-versed, well-disciplined, well-organised insurgent enemy (despite the fact that the MRLA in Malaya fitted none of these criteria either). The expenditure of significant military resources to the rural campaign was not in keeping with the pervading political position that Mau Mau constituted a nuisance, albeit a

⁴⁷ See the National Archive files CO 822/778 and WO 276/448 for official correspondence regarding Operation Hammer.

⁴⁸ TNA, WO 236/18, 'The Kenya Emergency, June 1953-May 1955: Report by General Sir George Erskine'.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

vicious one, that could be put down with ease. Again, this depicts a discernibly leaden approach to counter-insurgency, adverse to swift adaptation. The only considerable contribution to the rural campaign was unsurprisingly a low cost one: the utilisation of ‘pseudo gangs’.

Pseudo Gangs were constitutive of surrendered or captured enemy personnel. Initially utilised as trackers or guides for the British army, former Mau Mau were soon seen as an essential component for intelligence gathering and for bringing about ‘contact’ with insurgent units still in the forests. There is some contention as to who pioneered the use of pseudo gangs in Kenya, yet undeniably the two foremost proponents of the technique were Captain (later General Sir) Frank Kitson, and Detective Superintendent Ian Henderson. By Kitson’s own admission, ‘there was in fact nothing original about the (pseudo gang) idea itself, variations of which have been used in countless wars throughout history.’⁵⁰ Indeed, it was a method employed, albeit to a lesser extent, in Malaya, where Special Operation Volunteer Forces (SOVFs) formed by captured and surrendered insurgents returned to the jungle to track down their former comrades. However, the use of the pseudo gang technique in Kenya perhaps receives more attention than in previous conflicts because it had not hitherto played a significant role in the strategic outcome of a conflict, especially of the low intensity variety. Frank Kitson established a Special Methods Training Centre for the express purpose of professionalising the ‘turned’ surrendered or captured insurgents into capable and reliable allies in the counter-insurgency fight. This Centre, and the pseudo gang method

⁵⁰ Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, p.49.

as a whole, was sanctioned by General Erskine in June 1954, formalising the importance of the technique to the military hierarchy.⁵¹ In May 1955 Erskine's successor as Commander-in-Chief, Lt-General Gerald Lathbury, attempted to increase the use of pseudo gangs by establishing five Special Forces Teams, each consisting of ten ex-insurgents and commanded by a European – a manifestation of his belief that pseudo gangs were 'the most effective weapon against the terrorists.'⁵² The police also found the pseudo gang method conducive to producing tangible results. As Ian Henderson recalls in his account of his fabled pseudo gang effort to track down senior Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimathi, once surrendered or captured, former insurgents seemed to resign themselves to co-operating with the pseudo gangs, fearful of retribution from their former comrades and of similar treatment at the hands of the authorities should they not prove helpful: 'A hostile gang fighting against us yesterday became a tamed gang fighting for us today. We were not exactly converting these desperate men, but we were certainly recruiting them.'⁵³ Luise White, in an attempt to illuminate the practice of pseudo gang operations through gender literature, infers that pseudo gangs were engaged in a 'masquerade' tantamount to cross-racial 'drag' – a reference to the practice of white British soldiers blacking their faces and wearing wigs in an attempt to pass themselves off as Africans on pseudo gang operations.⁵⁴ Although the social, and indeed psychological, implications of 'blacking up' for military purposes may raise eyebrows, White's interpretation does not address the *consequences* of pseudo gang actions,

⁵¹ Heather, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in Kenya', p.75.

⁵² TNA, WO 236/20, 'The Kenya Emergency, May 1955-November 1956: A Report by Lt-General Sir Gerald Lathbury'.

⁵³ Ian Henderson (with Philip Goodheart), *The Hunt for Kimathi* (London: Pan, 1962), p.124.

⁵⁴ Luise White, 'Precarious Conditions: A Note on Counter-Insurgency in Africa After 1945', *Gender and History*, Vol.16 No.3 (November 2004), p.619.

namely the large intelligence dividend and the ability to locate and disband insurgent units too elusive to be tracked down by regular army units, and implies a pacifism to a form of warfare defined by its very ingenuity in the face of an asymmetric gap.

One of the foremost challenges to state armies engaging in warfare in that asymmetric gap is to adhere to conceptions of ‘minimum force’. Held up as one of the central planks of success in Malaya, it would be natural to assume that along with the raft of tactical, operational and structural designs that were gradually transferred by the British from Malaya to Kenya in the mid-1950s a concerted effort would have been made to uphold and conform to the notion of minimum force. This was not to be the case. Even before the critical historiographical turn, facilitated by new archival material, occurred in the early twenty-first century, academic opinion on the British conduct in Kenya has been uniformly damning – arguably only assessments of conduct in Northern Ireland match the Kenyan case for indictments of widespread disregard for civilian rights. Indeed, Thomas Mockaitis has pointed to what he labels ‘the “Black and Tan” phenomenon’ at work in Kenya, given the excessive use of force by the security forces on suspected insurgents and their purported supporters.⁵⁵ Caroline Elkins has gone as far as to describe the British campaign against the Mau Mau as ‘state-sanctioned terror,’⁵⁶ whilst John Newsinger has depicted British operations in Kenya as being of ‘unprecedented ferocity.’⁵⁷ The epicentre of much of this criticism lies with the treatment of detainees at interrogation camps (dealt with in detail in the next section), indiscriminate raids and

⁵⁵ Thomas R. Mockaitis, ‘Minimum Force, British Counter-Insurgency and the Mau Mau Rebellion: A Reply’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 3 No.2 (Autumn 1992), p.87.

⁵⁶ Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag*, p.73.

⁵⁷ Newsinger, ‘Minimum Force’, p.50.

round-ups that failed to distinguish Mau Mau from Kikuyu, or indeed Mau Mau from African (as encapsulated in Operation Anvil), and tales of British soldiers severing the hands of dead Mau Mau in lackadaisical and disrespectful efforts to match finger prints at police stations some distance away. Even the American Consul-General in Nairobi, Edmund Dorsz, felt compelled to report back to the State Department in October 1952 that: 'Arbitrary methods used by the police are also playing into the hands of the Mau Mau by alienating the good-will of the law-abiding Africans.'⁵⁸ In short, perversions away from minimum force practices perpetuated cycles of violence and reduced the counter-insurgency campaign's societal support base. This particular lesson, far from being learnt slowly, was arguable never imbibed at all in Kenya.

When he first arrived in Kenya, Major-Gen. Hinde cited minimum force as an essential component in operations conducted against Mau Mau: 'We must heed the example of Malaya and ensure that repressive measures do not result in an unbridgeable gap of bitterness between us and the Kikuyu.'⁵⁹ When Sir Evelyn Baring informed Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton of rumours of 'inhuman methods' being employed by the security forces in Kenya, Lyttelton expressed that he was 'determined to do all possible to prevent such excesses and to deal with them if allegations are substantiated.'⁶⁰ In his memoirs, Lyttelton put 'isolated incidents of atrocities' down to 'the breakdown of the quality of mercy under strain, or to panic in men of low intellectual capacity or low

⁵⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 'The Consul General at Nairobi (Dorsz) to the Department of State, Subject: Growing Concern over Mau Mau Activities' (10 October 1952), Vol. 10 (Part 1: Africa and South Asia, 1952-54).

⁵⁹ Cited in Percox, 'British Counter-Insurgency in Kenya', p.71.

⁶⁰ See the exchange of telegrams in TNA, CO 822/471, 11 and 12 February 1953.

personal courage.’⁶¹ However, in such a climate of fear, many allegations were left uncorroborated due to a widespread unwillingness to speak out against the police, Home Guard or army. The prevalence of beatings, torture and killings by British armed forces and, to a greater extent, the Kikuyu Home Guard in seemingly unaccountable corners of the Kenyan forest or detention camps (most infamously the deaths of eleven unarmed internees at the Hola Camp on 3 March 1959⁶²) ensured that, in Huw Bennett’s words, ‘fear became a strategic lever for combating the insurgency.’⁶³ British colonial perceptions of entering the savage African heart of darkness ultimately ended up justifying savagery of a different form: one that claimed it was fulfilling a ‘civilising process’ and one that was overlooked because it wore a uniform.

The Intelligence War Against Mau Mau

As far back as 1950, when Mau Mau had first emerged, the British had authorised the monitoring of the group and even attempted to infiltrate it in order to reap intelligence on its aims, membership and strategic intentions. This intelligence did partially aid the conduct of Operation Jock Scott, however the arrest and trial of high profile nationalist and trade union leaders, such as Jomo Kenyatta, with at best an ambiguous relationship

⁶¹ Oliver Lyttelton, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos* (London: The Bodley Head, 1962), p.402.

⁶² For the official report into the deaths at Hola Camp see ‘Cmd.778: Documents relating to the deaths of eleven Mau Mau detainees at Hola Camp in Kenya (London: HMSO, June 1959). A copy can be found in TNA, CAB 21/2906.

⁶³ Huw Bennett, ‘The Other Side of the COIN: Minimum and Exemplary Force in British Army Counter-Insurgency in Kenya’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.18 No.4 (2007), p.647.

with Mau Mau, demonstrates how inadequately the intelligence penetration of the group had been.⁶⁴ Randall Heather has argued that the intelligence agencies in Kenya were ‘woefully unprepared’ to face an insurgency, yet their saving grace was that Mau Mau as an insurgent group was also ill-prepared for a significant confrontation.⁶⁵

The colonial intelligence structure was fragmented and its agencies were given little attention or resources by the colonial administrators.⁶⁶ At the outbreak of the Emergency, Kenyan Special Branch consisted of just four officers (none of whom were African) and very few African rank and file (none of whom were operational in Kikuyu areas due to a lack of resources).⁶⁷ Even by General Erskine’s own admission, the intelligence section in Kenya initially constituted a ‘skeleton force.’⁶⁸ The daily duty of maintaining law and order in Mau Mau-threatened areas rested with the Kenya Police and the Kenya Police Reserve, a notoriously no-nonsense unit consisting of mainly white settler reservists. In the face of pre- and early Emergency intelligence failings, newly arrived Governor Sir Evelyn Baring acknowledged the need for a fundamental restructuring. Whitehall dispatched the Director-General of MI5, Sir Percy Sillitoe, in

⁶⁴ Even the American’s were unconvinced of claims that Kenyatta was the ringleader of Mau Mau. A declassified State Department intelligence report asserts that: ‘there is no substantial proof that he originated or directed the movement... (N)either the evidence submitted during the trial nor accounts of his activities during the movement’s formative period definitively establish his guilt.’ *Declassified Documents Reference System (DDRS)*, Department of State, Office of Intelligence Research, ‘Intelligence Report (No.6307): The Mau Mau – An Aggressive Reaction to Frustration’, 12 June 1953.

⁶⁵ Heather, ‘Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in Kenya’, p.62.

⁶⁶ Even the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, was damning of the ‘weakness of the intelligence service’ in Kenya and argued that ‘many security and remedial measures could have been taken earlier if the Colonial Office had been kept informed by the local governments.’ Lyttelton, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos*, p.393.

⁶⁷ Heather, ‘Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in Kenya’, p.62.

⁶⁸ TNA, WO 236/18, ‘The Kenya Emergency, June 1953-May 1955: A Report by General Sir George Erskine’.

November 1952 to review the intelligence set-up in Kenya and construct a report recommending changes. Sillitoe's report forwarded changes that would bring Kenya in line with the Malayan intelligence system. A national Intelligence Committee was established to centralise the collection and analytical process, to be chaired by an Intelligence Advisor to the Governor (a departure from the Malayan model, whereby a Chief of Intelligence oversaw the entire process with a more hands on role). Although Sillitoe's plan of action was heeded, it took some time before the changes were implemented, and even longer before the benefits could be reaped.⁶⁹ Randall Heather has argued that two factors prevented the Kenyan intelligence authorities from learning from Malaya in the early stage of the Emergency. Firstly, there was a pervasive belief within the colony's political elite that Mau Mau would be defeated quickly, therefore negating the need for intensive intelligence work. Secondly, there was a desire emanating from London that Kenya was to be treated differently from Malaya and that comparisons between the two conflicts were undesirable.⁷⁰ On this latter point, a series of telegram exchanges between the War Office and the GHQ Middle East Land Forces (who had ultimate responsibility for East Africa) only several months into the Emergency reveals an eagerness within the military and political hierarchy 'to avoid even the appearance of direct comparison with Malaya.'⁷¹

However, certain structural changes were enacted that enhanced the efficiency of intelligence collection, analysis and dissemination in Kenya. Intelligence Committees

⁶⁹ Percox, 'British Counter-Insurgency in Kenya', p.70.

⁷⁰ Heather, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in Kenya', p.66.

⁷¹ TNA, WO 216/560, exchange of telegrams between War Office and GHQ MELF, 28 and 29 November 1952.

were established in 1953, on a district, provincial and national level to ensure a more effective and widespread flow of intelligence. Yet these committees only served to disseminate police and Special Branch intelligence. There was still a shortfall in military intelligence that would lead to ‘contact’ with insurgent units, despite the appointment of 52 Field Intelligence Officers (FIOs) in early 1954.⁷² In order to breach this gap (which was in part filled by pseudo-gang operations) Joint Army Police Operational Intelligence Teams (JAPOIT) were formed in and around Mau Mau strongholds.⁷³ Although a step forward, intelligence collection still remained focussed on the political rather than the military activities of what the police jokingly referred to as the ‘Mickey Mau’s’.⁷⁴ Yet as insurgent violence intensified the need for operational intelligence increased – one of the most pertinent lessons to emanate from Malaya. Accordingly, army officers were seconded to Special Branch teams in the field to garner ‘hot’ intelligence on Mau Mau. However, a lack of manpower and adequate training ensured that results were stultified.⁷⁵ This was compounded at the national level by a lack of co-ordination. The head of Special Branch was not obliged to report to the military Director of Operations, resulting in an absence of military-intelligence liaison. Lt.Gen. Lathbury duly noted this divide and made moves to locate military intelligence within Special Branch and ensured that the Director of Intelligence Services had to report direct to the Director of Operations. Yet this was enacted three years into the Emergency, and brought a belated coherence to the process.

⁷² For a tangible sense of the frustration at the difficulties of successfully tracking down Mau Mau insurgents in the forest, see the intelligence reports in the recently declassified National Archive file CO 276/431.

⁷³ Heather, ‘Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in Kenya’, p.67.

⁷⁴ Interview with Chief Inspector Roy ‘Robbie’ Robertson (ret’d), Kenya Police (Mombassa district), 9 June 2008.

⁷⁵ Heather, ‘Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency’, p.68.

The capture, arrest and interrogation of senior Mau Mau leader General China (real name Waruhiu Itote) in January 1954 was, in the words of David Anderson, ‘the first intelligence breakthrough of the war.’⁷⁶ Itote divulged sensitive operational material to Assistant Superintendent Ian Henderson, the Kikuyu-speaking police officer who did much to pioneer the pseudo-gang technique.⁷⁷ Yet as he awaited trial, Itote was offered an extraordinary deal, hatched by Henderson and approved by Governor Baring. On the proviso of waiving the death sentence, Itote was to return to the forests surrounding Mount Kenya and organise a mass surrender of the insurgent units situated there in conjunction with the Chief Native Commissioner (the only African in the Kenyan cabinet). Although Operation Wedgwood was to end in failure, Itote’s efforts were not the first attempt at inducing the surrender of Mau Mau insurgents. The first offer to relinquish the death penalty for those who gave themselves up (disseminated, as in Malaya, by Voice Aircraft flying over the forests) in August 1953 induced just sixty-six surrenders.⁷⁸ The failure of Operation Wedgwood in April 1954 marked a hiatus in surrender attempts until February 1955 when similar offers to the 1953 proposals were offered, again with scant response.⁷⁹ This succession of surrender offers, designed primarily to appeal to the reluctant, forced or wavering insurgents (given the widespread colonial belief that most insurgents were coerced into taking Mau Mau oaths), were approved by General Erskine and angered the white settler community as they, as John

⁷⁶ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p.233.

⁷⁷ The report of General China’s interrogation can be found in TNA, WO 276/512, ‘Interrogation of Waruhiu s/o Itote, 26 January 1954.’

⁷⁸ Percox, ‘British Counter-Insurgency in Kenya’, pp.79-80.

⁷⁹ Paget, *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning*, pp.105-107.

Lonsdale puts it, 'thwarted the lust for revenge.'⁸⁰ Bloodlust aside, the efforts did succeed in securing the surrender of over 1,000 insurgents by 1955⁸¹, who offered a potential intelligence gold-mine in terms of revealing the size, movement and operational intentions of their former units. Yet perhaps the one major point of note in regard to the Kenya surrender offers in relation to the schemes established concurrently in Malaya, was the lack of financial inducement offered to Mau Mau. Members of the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA) were, as discussed in the previous chapter, lured to hand themselves in for the promise of a lump sum upon their surrender. No such scheme (successfully employed in Malaya, though not without controversy) was replicated in Kenya despite the perceivable stagnancy of existing surrender efforts and the political unwillingness to draw Mau Mau into a protracted and potentially bloody campaign. Explanations for this must lie firstly in the colonial interpretations of Mau Mau's atavism (at least the communist MRLA had a perceptibly rational ideological premise) and secondly with an arguably subjugatory view the colonialists had of Africans being unwilling or unable to better themselves economically, unlike their more prosperous and advanced counterparts in Asia. Gathering intelligence on Mau Mau would come at a price, but evidently not at any significant financial cost. The authorities, in the absence of any fundamental intelligence breakthrough, were largely reliant on the internal deficiencies of Mau Mau to undermine and stall the insurgency from within – a fortunate circumstance given the torpid and blunt nature of the British strategy.

⁸⁰ Lonsdale, 'Mau Maus of the Mind', p.415. For Erskine's outline of the improved surrender offer see TNA WO, 276/430, 'Directive from Commander in Chief, 12 January 1955'.

⁸¹ Estimate based on the total surrenders accrued over the three separate offers. Figures provided in Percox, 'British Counter-Insurgency in Kenya', and Heather, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in Kenya'.

The Organisation of Mau Mau

Mau Mau was constituted, as most 'classical' insurgent groups tended to be, of an armed and a support wing. The militant Land and Freedom Armies were responsible for mounting insurgent attacks, whilst the Passive Wing attempted to ensure a supply of weapons and food to the guerrillas. By early 1952, before the Emergency officially began, a Kikuyu War Council had been established in Nairobi to co-ordinate an arms procurement scheme. By August of that year KAU militants (the nominal Mau Mau) were infiltrating rural areas in preparation for an insurgency. By the end of that year it was estimated that Mau Mau was in possession of 400-800 modern weapons. By the end of 1953 they had acquired nearly 300 more. These weapons had to be split between an insurgent group boasting a membership of between 12-15,000.⁸² This means that at any given time a maximum of only 15 per cent of insurgents possessed firearms, with estimates of a further 30-40 per cent brandishing homemade weapons as they served in self styled *batuni* (platoons).⁸³

However, the organisation of Mau Mau was to be fractured by a series of political and military divisions, perpetuating the incoherent strategy discussed above. There was never a single political or military leader of Mau Mau, despite the efforts of British

⁸² Weigart, *Religion and Guerilla Warfare in Modern Africa*, pp.27-28.

⁸³ Heather, 'Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency in Kenya', p.58.

propaganda to single out Jomo Kenyatta as the insurgent puppet master. As David Anderson points out, 'each leader did pretty much as the fancy took him... (E)ach tried to impose a more rigorous structure of command, but none succeeded...'⁸⁴ Indeed the cult of personality, as a consequence of a fractured leadership, helps explain why small forest groups attached their allegiances to larger groups led by guerrillas with widespread reputations. This led to a pattern of integration and explains the organisational phenomena of large insurgent clusters in remote areas.⁸⁵ As the insurgency escalated in early 1953, the militant wing of Mau Mau split into three semi-autonomous operational teams, who were often in dispute with each other: Dedan Kimathi led the guerrillas in the Aberdare Mountains; General China took command of the grouping around Mount Kenya; whilst a Central Committee controlled operations in Nairobi. Although this committee was nominally the executive authority of the insurgency, it was widely acknowledged that decision-making really lay with the forest leaders. This provides an interesting insight into the relationship between the rural and the urban elements of the insurgency. Unlike in Malaya, where the MRLA failed to make any inroads into fomenting an urban revolt, the Mau Mau's concomitant presence in town and country presented an additional challenge to the security forces and political authorities. Far from proving a dichotomous insurgency, there does appear to have been 'positive interaction between Nairobi's urban militants and the rural activists.'⁸⁶ Indeed, it was the mutual discontent of landless agrarian Kikuyu and the radicalisation of Nairobi's urban Kikuyu in the face of deteriorating social conditions that catalysed the insurgency into a parallel urban and rural uprising. Although the number of armed Mau

⁸⁴ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p.248.

⁸⁵ Barnett, *Mau Mau From Within*, p.156.

⁸⁶ M. Tamarkin, 'Mau Mau in Nakuru', *Journal of African History*, Vol.17 No.1 (1976), p.120.

Mau in Nairobi itself never reached more than 300, there was tangible popular support for the insurgents in the city that David Anderson has gone as far as to label 'Mau Mau's beating heart.'⁸⁷

However, by 1955 the Mau Mau insurgency was internally divided by a split within the political leadership. The two factions, the peasant-orientated Kenya *Riigi* group and the middle class Kenya Parliament, became quickly irreconcilable over the political endgame of the insurgency. This organisational rift dealt a blow to the Mau Mau cause as a whole and provoked widespread disillusionment amongst the armed insurgents. This was reflected in a huge decrease in Mau Mau volunteers, a trend accentuated by the intensification of the British counter-insurgency effort. Intelligence estimates put Mau Mau membership by early 1955 at around 6,000. By the end of the year, the figure had dropped to just 1,500.⁸⁸ This crystallised the Mau Mau insurgency as one undermined by perennial organisational fragmentation, militarily and politically, which only aggravated the discrepancies of fostering an ill-conceived strategy.

Mau Mau Strategy and Tactics

Just as the origins of Mau Mau are shrouded in mystery, so too were their strategic objectives. Not inspired by any specific ideology, it is difficult to pin down with any

⁸⁷ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p.200.

⁸⁸ Weigart, *Religion and Guerrilla Warfare in Modern Africa*, p.32.

accuracy the political and military manifesto of Mau Mau given the absence of any literature and the prevalence of mysticism surrounding its actions. Yet such was the porous nature of Mau Mau that the movement survived the initial attempts to stamp it out, with armed groups taking to the forest shortly after the declaration of the Emergency, as an embryonic insurgency developed. The insurgents operated in four main areas in the Kikuyu areas of Kenya: the Aberdare Mountains; Mount Kenya; the capital Nairobi; and the Kikuyu tribal reserve to the north. There is scant evidence to suggest that the unit leaders operating in these different areas were in close communication or formulated shared strategic goals. Therefore, it perhaps makes more sense to refer to multiple Mau Mau strategies, each revolving around a set of localised initiatives, rather than a holistic unifying strategy.

In terms of their level of preparedness for launching their insurgency (unintentional though this might have been, especially given the question of whether it was a cause or a consequence of the declaration of Emergency) it should be remembered that unlike the communist insurgents in Malaya who had developed a wealth of combat experience fighting the Japanese in World War Two, Mau Mau fighters had no formalising military or paramilitary experience (although a small number had fought in the King's African Rifles during World War Two). This in part helps explain their tactical preference for small-scale attacks against white settlers and Kikuyu loyalists in isolated communities with little or no security force protection. Indeed, the most defining Mau Mau atrocity of the entire insurgency would reinforce such tactical preferences. On 26 March 1953 up to 1,000 Mau Mau insurgents attacked the predominantly loyalist Kikuyu village of Lari,

killing over 100 villagers and burning their homes. The Lari massacre marked a turning point for Mau Mau for a number of reasons. Firstly, it demonstrated that operational planning, no matter how primitive, was still possible despite the arrest and incarceration of its purported leaders. Secondly, it demonstrated that the primary strategic 'enemy' in Mau Mau's eyes were not necessarily the white settlers but loyalist Kikuyu's. Indeed, despite being depicted in propaganda as an anti-white movement, Mau Mau killed just 32 white settlers during the Emergency, compared to the deaths of 1,821 fellow Kikuyu.⁸⁹ Thirdly, it acted as a stark warning to the colonial and British security forces that complacency regarding the abilities of Mau Mau to stage large scale attacks was misplaced and that 'victory' would not come easily. Fourthly, the fact that an audacious raid by insurgents against the police station in the village of Naivasha, just thirty miles from Lari, occurred at the same time yet independent of the Lari attackers demonstrated the strategic reification of Mau Mau. As a result of this fragmentation, Mau Mau was not to achieve a level of cogency either as a political or a paramilitary movement.

The main cluster of Mau Mau offensive action occurred between October 1952 and July 1953, necessitated by the requirements of newly formed insurgent groups to fight for the acquirement of supplies and weapons (the premise behind the Naivasha raid). This was permitted by the thinly spread density of the colonial and British security forces. Attacks waned after July 1953 as the military engaged in a series of offensives against Mau

⁸⁹ Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, p.140. Even Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton acknowledged that 'the overwhelming weight of the Mau Mau attack fell upon their fellow Africans.' Lyttelton, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos*, p.397.

Mau-controlled forestry, which disrupted insurgent supply lines.⁹⁰ By 1955, weakened by the capture of several key leaders including General China, Mau Mau's strategic incoherence became amplified in the face of a more aggressive counter-insurgency approach by the British military. The strategic confusion surrounding Mau Mau does stand in contrast to the MRLA's more defined communist and anti-colonial goals. Yet there are more commonalities between the two insurgent groups than there would first appear. Bruce Hoffman and Jennifer Taw have pointed out five fundamental similarities. In both instances the insurgents:

- '(1) Were part of a clearly defined minority group in an ethnically stratified environment.
- (2) Used violence as a means of controlling the population.
- (3) Attacked primarily in rural or jungle areas.
- (4) Based the majority of operations within the country rather than in neighbouring countries.
- (5) Received little or no support from outside powers.'⁹¹

These similarities go some way to help us understand why so much strategic and tactical import was conducted by the British between the two campaigns (although issue must be

⁹⁰ Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, p.86.

⁹¹ Bruce Hoffman and Jennifer M. Taw, *Defence Policy and Low Intensity Conflict: The Development of Britain's 'Small Wars' Doctrine During the 1950s* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1991), p.21.

taken with their third point, given Mau Mau's presence and activity in Nairobi). But the British were fortunate that not only was Mau Mau strategically confused but it was restricted by a limited amount of support not just within Kenya but within Kikuyu tribal areas.

Internal Support for Mau Mau

Sympathy for Mau Mau within Kenya was generated by a set of real and mythical injustices emanating from elements within the Kikuyu tribe against the white settlers regarding grievances over land rights. Yet the popular appeal of the Mau Mau was stunted from the outset by a series of factors un-conducive to the spread of a nascent insurgency. Mau Mau did not embody the hopes and frustrations of the African population in Kenya. Furthermore, it did not even embody the feelings and sentiments of the entire Kikuyu tribe from which the movement originated. Educated, more urban tribe members, although sharing anti-colonial sentiments, were repelled by the feral tactics and mystical oath-taking of Mau Mau. This sociological divide between the Kikuyu ensured that Mau Mau would lack an appeal across the strata of Kikuyu, depriving the insurgency of not only a political vanguard, but also a tier of paramilitary strategists, leaving the movement weak and fatally constrained.⁹²

⁹² Weigart, *Religion and Guerrilla Warfare in Modern Africa*, p.27.

The colonial authorities certainly exploited the schism between the loyalist Kikuyu and those who pledged their allegiance to Mau Mau. Kikuyu Home Guard units were at the centre of the counter-insurgency campaign in rural areas, providing law and order and capturing Mau Mau. The innovative implementation of pseudo-gang operations pitting former insurgents against their erstwhile comrades, combined with the fluid status of some Kikuyu from reluctant Mau Mau to staunch loyalist as a result of a mercurial balance of power in some communities, ensured that, in Daniel Branch's words, 'the Mau Mau war was no simple dispute between coloniser and colonised.'⁹³ Although reference to a *de facto* Kikuyu civil war given the death toll amongst loyalist Kikuyu's overlooks the need in counter-insurgency to alienate the insurgents from the societal group from which they stemmed with an increased emphasis on turning their ethnic or religious brethren against them (for example, the Malayan campaign made use of surrendered enemy personnel in operations and sought to increase Chinese recruitment to the police force) it does highlight the alienated and disputed nature of Mau Mau's insurgency even within its own tribal group. Revealingly, during his interrogation by Special Branch, General China showed no remorse that the Mau Mau rising had instigated inter-Kikuyu violence, and appeared to revel in the need to eliminate the loyalist elements:

'Q. Why does the Mau Mau concentrate on attacking its own tribe?

⁹³ Daniel Branch, 'The Enemy Within: Loyalists and the War Against the Mau Mau in Kenya', *Journal of African History*, Vol.48 (2007), p.294.

A. If you want to go away in a car and you find the back tyre is punctured, you have to stop and mend it before you can go on.’⁹⁴

With limited internal support that spilled over into internecine violence, Mau Mau was further restricted in its actions by a paucity of external support also.

External Support for Mau Mau

Mau Mau was perhaps the most isolated insurgent group to fight the British in the post-war era. Internally alienated from widespread support given its narrow tribal appeal, Mau Mau was further limited in garnering logistical aid by the caprice of Kenya’s geographical location – with the exception of Ethiopia, the country was surrounded on all borders by countries controlled by colonial powers (Uganda and Tanganyika by Britain, and Somaliland by Italy). Notions of Mau Mau heading a vanguard of pan-African nationalism are understandably sidelined. Solidarity may have been abundant for the seemingly anti-colonial nature of Mau Mau’s insurgency, yet no evidence has surfaced of militant nationalist groups from other African countries supplying Mau Mau with arms, finance or other aid, despite the prevalent rumour ‘bandied about by the

⁹⁴ TNA, WO 276/512, ‘Interrogation of Waruhiu s/o Itote, 26 January 1954’.

settlers... that Mau Mau was directed from the Soviet Embassy in Addis Ababa.’⁹⁵ So worried was the Foreign Office by these unsubstantiated rumours that it issued guidelines for counter-arguments to put pay to this persistent story.⁹⁶ Interestingly, the deputy Governor of neighbouring Uganda reported to Sir Evelyn Baring in January 1954 the presence of approximately 80 Kenyans in Uganda who intelligence sources believed had taken the Mau Mau oath.⁹⁷ Fearful of an attempt by Mau Mau to secure cross-border support or supplies, the colonial authorities in Uganda screened 1,074 members of the Kikuyu tribe who lived in the country and served 198 of them with Detention and Removal Orders for implication in Mau Mau activities by July 1954.⁹⁸ No evidence exists, however, of any successful or significant external supplies emanating from Uganda despite the deportations.

Despite the fervent claims of those on the right-wing in Britain, who in Bruce Berman’s words ‘saw a Russian agent behind every thorn tree’, the colonial authorities in Kenya ‘well knew that there was no Soviet support or encouragement for Mau Mau,’ in large part due to the colonial depiction of Mau Mau as an alienated and backward tribal uprising.⁹⁹ On 4 May 1953, the British Embassy in Moscow informed the Foreign Office that ‘developments in Kenya have been receiving constant but not leading attention in the Central Soviet press.’ The telegram, dismissive of Soviet overlordship of Mau Mau,

⁹⁵ A.S Cleary, ‘The Myth of Mau Mau in its International Context’, *African Affairs*, Vol.89 No.355 (April 1990), p.240.

⁹⁶ TNA, CO 822/461, ‘Telegram from Foreign Office to Asmara, 26 January 1953’.

⁹⁷ TNA, CO 822/818, ‘Telegram from Deputy Governor of Uganda to Governor of Kenya, 15 January 1954’.

⁹⁸ TNA, CO 822/818, ‘Extract from Uganda Monthly Intelligence Appreciation for period ended 31 July 1954.’

⁹⁹ Berman, ‘The Paradox of Mau Mau’, p.193.

goes on to note that references to Jomo Kenyatta, who the British perceived as the leader of the insurgency, were ‘noticeably ungarnished with the epithets and phrases usually applied to persons or groups who enjoy Moscow’s direct benediction.’¹⁰⁰ In any case, the Soviet policy, instigated under Nikita Khrushchev, of supporting African liberation struggles was not initiated until the 1960s, by which time Kenya had already been granted independence. Caroline Elkins has argued that Governor Evelyn Baring ‘despaired that Mau Mau was not communist. Had it been, the British government would have given them a blank cheque to suppress the movement, as it had done with General Templer.’¹⁰¹ The only indication of external communist support came from a clique of Indian intellectuals, linked to Kenya via the sizeable Asian population in the colony, but ‘in all probability there was minimal, low-level support and nothing more.’¹⁰² Despite General Erskine’s declaration that ‘the Indian Government verbally and to a small extent financially, encourages nationalism amongst African politicians, particularly Kikuyu ones,’¹⁰³ the Deputy Governor of Kenya felt confident enough to inform the Colonial Secretary that ‘there is no evidence of any such (external) assistance being given’ to the Mau Mau.¹⁰⁴ The lack of external support in part helps explain Mau Mau’s reliance on homemade weaponry, namely the hand crafted *panga* knife. Taking all this evidence into account we can build a picture of Mau Mau as an insurgent movement physically isolated in the dense forests, politically isolated by the narrow

¹⁰⁰ TNA, CO 822/461, ‘Confidential Telegram from British Embassy in Moscow to Foreign Office, 4 May 1953.’

¹⁰¹ Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag*, p.56.

¹⁰² Cleary, ‘The Myth of Mau Mau in its International Context’, p.241.

¹⁰³ TNA, WO 216/863, ‘Appreciation of Future Military Policy in Kenya, 1954’.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, CO 822/495, ‘Telegram from Deputy Governor of Kenya to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 July 1953.’

tribal appeal of their cause, and internationally isolated by the lack of external support that constituted more than vocal solidarity.

The International Context of the Campaign Against Mau Mau

By the time the official counter-insurgency campaign was launched in 1952, American anti-colonial ideals had been relegated to mere rhetoric, given new president Dwight Eisenhower's priorities of interventionist anti-communism - itself an aggrandised version of the Truman Doctrine. In any case, British depictions of Mau Mau as a savage tribal cult helped stem any potential American opposition to colonial suppression and shored up American support for a gradual process of Kenyan national development. The 'sideshow' interpretation of Mau Mau within the wider scheme of 1950s British foreign and defence policy is mirrored when placing it in the context of 1950s international relations. The death of Stalin and the wary relations between the new Soviet nomenclature and the new warrior-politician President in Washington ensured that a tribal uprising in a small corner of Kenya represented a ripple in the grander ocean of geostrategic Cold War thinking. As A.S Cleary observes, when both countries did acknowledge the events unfolding in Kenya, American views 'ranged from seeing the spectre of international communism... to seeing them a primitive yet genuine manifestation of African nationalism... The Soviet Union, in general... (thought) Mau

Mau was either an anti-imperialist revolt or a figment of the imperialists' lurid imagination.'¹⁰⁵

It does though remain an interesting point as to why the British never played the communist card in Kenya. Crying foul of communist interference would certainly have enlisted the overt support of the Americans and would have ordained Western legitimacy upon the crack-down. However, such an invitation would arguably have generated an impression that the British could not deal with a rebellion in a corner of their Empire and projected an image of an incapable and weak world power. In any case, the Americans themselves were well aware, as a December 1953 *National Intelligence Estimate* put it, that: 'The Mau Mau terrorist movement in Kenya presents an excellent target for Communist exploitation; however, we have no conclusive evidence of Communist influence in the movement.'¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the constant portrayal to the outside world by the British of the barbarous image of Mau Mau in both political and cultural propaganda¹⁰⁷ ensured that 'together with faith in the adequacy of the British response... the United States consistently distanced itself from the revolt.'¹⁰⁸ Consequently, the fight against Mau Mau was able to be disengaged from the wider global ideological tumult as a means of emphasising the peripheral nature of the Mau Mau insurgency.

¹⁰⁵ Cleary, 'The Myth of Mau Mau in its International Context', p.228.

¹⁰⁶ *FRUS*, 'National Intelligence Estimate (NIE-83): Conditions and Trends in Tropical Africa' (22 December 1953), Vol.10 (Part 1, 1952-54).

¹⁰⁷ For an interesting comparative analysis of the cultural portrayal of insurgents in the Kenyan and Malayan Emergencies in cinematic films see Susan Caruruthers, 'Two Faces of Terrorism: The Film Presentation of Mau Mau and the Malayan Emergency', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.6 No.1 (1995), pp.17-43.

¹⁰⁸ Cleary, 'The Myth of Mau Mau in its International Context', p.244.

Reflections on the Kenya Campaign

Maybe Frank Kitson was right. Maybe Kenya did represent a ‘sideshow’ amidst the wider circus of 1950s international relations. Yet its value as a case worthy of study is not diminished by its peripheral nature, firstly because of its value as an example of partial and slow counter-insurgency lesson transferral, and secondly due to the long under-exposed darker side to the eventual defeat of the Mau Mau uprising. The official death toll of ‘combatants’ on each side was put at around 13,500. Of this figure, 11,503 were supposed Mau Mau insurgents – a disproportionate number given that Mau Mau was estimated to only have 12,000 members at its peak. British and settler police and army fatalities numbered 63. The largest burden of the counter-insurgent forces was taken by the Kikuyu Home Guard, who suffered 1,920 killed.¹⁰⁹ These figures reveal several characteristics of the counter-insurgency campaign in Kenya. The Home Guard fatality ratio to that of British soldiers discloses how the colonial authorities were complicit in allowing tensions within the Kikuyu community to be manipulated, rendering the conflict a *de facto* civil war as a means of reducing the ‘white man’s burden’. More illuminating is the Mau Mau death toll. At best, it merely exposes Mau Mau’s woeful inability to have waged a successful insurgency given their lack of resources, training and support in the face of overwhelming fire and manpower held by the colonial authorities. In short, it was an annihilation waiting to happen. At worst, it

¹⁰⁹ Weigart, *Traditional Religion and Guerrilla Warfare in Africa*, p.33.

reveals a disproportionate and indiscriminate level of violence undertaken by the counter-insurgent forces who wantonly eliminated an inferior combatant with little adherence to notions of minimum force. The suppression of the Mau Mau did not require an overt military effort on behalf of the British armed forces, and the levels of troop deployment only ever constituted a relatively small-scale campaign, yet Kenya's distinction in the lineage of British counter-insurgency stems from several sources. It marks the first occasion in the post-war period that counter-insurgency lessons could be transferred from one theatre of operations to another, via a combination of organisational, tactical and personnel conveyance. This was to prove a piecemeal process. Furthermore, it also represented the first occasion in the post-war era where the British army had to plan and conduct concomitant urban and rural counter-insurgency operations. This would later have ramifications in Cyprus, Yemen and ultimately Northern Ireland (where Frank Kitson, who cut his counter-insurgency teeth in Kenya, would get to put his ideas into action on a grander scale).

It could be argued that Mau Mau was doomed from the start. With no coherent strategic plan, a fractured leadership, limited resources, a narrow domestic appeal and no external support, Mau Mau were perhaps the most ill-equipped insurgent enemy the British have had to face in the post-war era. This conceivably ensured that the decidedly overzealous implementation of lessons from Malaya went beyond traditional notions of operational 'success' and crossed into darker territory of violence undertaken with impunity. Unlike the Malayan tin and rubber plants, Kenya contained no significant resources of importance to the British Empire. Combined with the relatively low cost of the Kenya

campaign and the constricted appeal of Mau Mau's message, London was therefore not forced to rethink the entire premise of its colonial presence in the country as a result of the insurgency. Although David Percox is partially correct in arguing that 'at no stage did the British counter-insurgency campaign in Kenya constitute part of a Colonial Office plan for decolonisation', it does miss the broader point that it was the politically and militarily acceptable outcome of the campaign that enabled an eventual process of stage-managed decolonisation, independent of the Mau Mau catalyst, to take place in 1963 as a result of the Lancaster House summit of 1960 – the year the Emergency was officially revoked. Controlling every last vestige of the relinquishment of control over the Kenyan body politic, the Police Commissioner Richard Catling ordered in the weeks running up to formal independence that all police files on Kenyan tribal leaders, Kenyan politicians and public figures (files filled with innuendo, rumours and lies to discredit their reputation) should be burned before the British handed-over control in order to hide the methods of discrediting potential opponents to colonial authority, insurgent or not.¹¹⁰

Although lasting eight years, all major counter-insurgency operations were ostensibly over within four. On 13 November 1956, Lt-General Lathbury officially announced the withdrawal of the British army from operations in Kenya, satisfied that Mau Mau was sufficiently defeated and law and order adequately restored.¹¹¹ That it took the British four years to eradicate this severely deficient insurgency is in itself an indictment of the efficacy of the British strategy at large. The renewed historical interest in these four

¹¹⁰ Interview with Chief Inspector Roy 'Robbie' Robertson, Kenya Police (ret'd), 9 June 2008.

¹¹¹ TNA, WO 236/20, 'Order of the Day by Lt-General Sir Gerald Lathbury, 13 November 1956.'

years has given the study of the Mau Mau a new lease of life, and has opened up new avenues through which to explore this most Hobbesian of counter-insurgency campaigns: one that was indeed nasty, brutish and relatively short.

CHAPTER 5: *'The Primacy of Politics: British Counter-Insurgency Operations in Aden and South Arabia, 1962-67'*

The campaign in South Arabia between 1962 and 1967 represented the most distinct turning point in the lineage of British counter-insurgency since World War Two. It presented a disjuncture in terms of how counter-insurgency was planned, executed, and ultimately concluded. This chapter observes five primary factors, contained within the framework of the Tri-partite Model, as to why British military operations in South Arabia and the protectorate of Aden changed the rules of the asymmetric game whilst still displaying overt traits of slowly applied lessons and the slow implementation of a coherent military strategy before it was politically curtailed. Firstly, it marked for the first time in contemporary British counter-insurgency operations the complete supremacy of political priorities over military necessities, above and beyond the inherent politicised exigencies of counter-insurgency strategy. The political decision to publicly announce a withdrawal from South Arabia and Aden before the military objectives had been achieved denoted a seismic shift in the civil-military relationship over strategic planning in an asymmetric conflict environment. Secondly, counter-insurgency operations were politically motivated not solely by unfolding events on the ground but were partially driven by unfulfilled vendettas and vengeful ploys for redemption emanating from Whitehall. The spectre of Suez provided a strategic straightjacket for operations in South Arabia. Britain's 1956 humbling by Colonel Nasser became a

primary reference point for the political considerations surrounding the Yemen campaign, for both hawks, who saw Yemen as an opportunity to purge the memories of Suez's humiliation, and for the doves, who held Suez up as a cautionary tale of imperialist meddling in Arab affairs. Thirdly, the British army had not hitherto fought an insurgent group with such an overt level of supplies and solidarity from an external source. The permeation of Nasser's influence, munitions, and troops into Yemen sculpted the political and military nature of the conflict. Whereas in Malaya and Kenya the paucity of external funding and weaponry significantly hindered the longevity of the insurgency, in Yemen the constant stream of Egyptian arms ensured that a military victory for the British could not be guaranteed with the assurance it had in previous conflicts. Fourthly, never before had the international political dimension played such a significant part in shaping British thinking. Pressure from the United States and the United Nations weighed heavily in the minds of those controlling policy on Yemen, whilst the Six Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbours in June 1967 impacted upon Nasser's ability and willingness to divert Egyptian military resources to unsettling the British presence in South Arabia. Finally, South Arabia represented for the first time in the post-World War Two era an example of the British conducting a sizeable portion of their counter-insurgency operations covertly, with official political denial they are taking place. This was a by-product of both the delicate international situation and of the secretive Whitehall scheming to undermine Egyptian influence. The application of the Tri-Partite Model will help unravel the significance of these inter-twined themes and signify the relevance of the factors that impacted on the outcome of this one campaign to the broader sweep of British counter-insurgency experience.

The campaign in the Yemen has amassed a body of literature that has attempted to deconstruct the military and political exigencies of this most extraordinary of conflicts. The literature falls into two broad categories. The first is the depository of books that emerged in the immediate aftermath of the humiliating retreat. Senior political figures¹, military commanders², journalists who had closely covered the story³, and military analysts⁴ were quick to deconstruct the failings of the British campaign. The intrigues of authorising covert mercenary missions and the political hubris that engendered ‘defeat’ in South Arabia led to a second wave of literature to emerge in the early twenty-first century, as the West again involves itself in counter-insurgency in the Middle East. At the forefront of this new generation of literature on the dimensions of the conflict is Clive Jones’ work on the military machinations of the politicised covert war waged in Yemen and its intelligence aspects.⁵ Aside from Jones’ important work, a smattering of other books analysing the overt military campaign⁶, and the political and social implications of the insurgency⁷ have reawakened interest in this campaign that began with the most secret of involvements and ended with a most public withdrawal.

¹ Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber: A South Arabian Episode* (London: Hutchinson, 1968).

² Julian Paget, *Last Post: Aden, 1964-1967* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969); David Smiley (with Peter Kemp), *Arabian Assignment* (London: Leo Cooper, 1975).

³ Dana Adams Schmidt, *Yemen: The Unknown War* (London: Bodley Head, 1968).

⁴ Edgar O’Ballance, *The War in the Yemen* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1971).

⁵ Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-65: Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins – Foreign Policy and the Limits of Covert Action* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).

⁶ Jonathan Walker, *Aden Insurgency: The Savage War in South Arabia, 1962-67* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2005).

⁷ Peter Hinchcliffe, John T. Ducker and Maria Holt, *Without Glory in Arabia: The British Retreat from Aden* (London: IB Tauris, 2006).

Background to the Insurgency

The port of Aden had become a British possession in 1839 when the town was occupied and utilised as a trading post on the way to the Indian sub-continent by the East India Company. It was held as a Protectorate until 1 January 1963 when it eventually merged with the Federation of Yemen (an agglomeration of sultanates, sheikdoms and tribal entities) to form the Federation of South Arabia (FSA) – although, crucially for political control of the coming counter-insurgency campaign, the FSA was not a British colony *per se*, but was run by an indigenous Federal Council under the auspices of the British, who were allowed to keep their military bases.⁸ The strategic importance of Aden to the British was underlined in 1960 when it replaced Cyprus as the British Army's General Headquarters (GHQ) of Middle East Land Forces (MELF) in the wake of the EOKA insurgent campaign on the island. Therefore, next to London and Singapore (GHQ of Far East Land Forces, FARELF) Aden represented one of the triumvirate of locations critical to Britain's global military presence. Yet it was not just military efficacy at stake in the protection of the FSA; the British were also keen to shield their economic interests in this most inorganic of federations, notably the large British Petroleum (BP) refinery in Aden.⁹

⁸ Glen Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East: Britain's Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Arab Dependencies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.49 & p.78.

⁹ Thomas Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency in the Post-Imperial Era* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.45.

Importantly, the entire campaign must be placed in the wider context of the Yemeni civil war. On 26 September 1962 a coup by a group of left-wing army officers inspired by Nasser's ideals of Arab nationalism, overthrew the Imam of Yemen, Mohammed al-Badr, sparking an internecine conflict between the royalist FSA and the breakaway Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). It was to be in the crucible of the Yemeni civil war that the British would first forge their interventionist policies, steeled by a desire to augment the capabilities of the pro-British royalists in the face of the Egyptian-backed republicans. Yet it was not until 1963 that republican dissidents from the FSA initiated an insurgent campaign inside Yemen itself, penetrating the soft underbelly of British control. The urban campaign in Aden, at first instigated by the YAR and Egyptian-sponsored insurgent group the National Liberation Front (NLF), must be seen as a parallel yet distinct conflict to that being undertaken as part of the civil war. British efforts to defeat the NLF represented the overt plank of the counter-insurgency campaign, triggering the deployment of troops to the streets of Aden and a formalised intelligence-gathering and interrogation network. Yet it was the concomitant rural campaign in the Arabian hinterland that formed the covert plank of British involvement. The secret deployment of mercenary SAS units to train, equip and fight alongside FSA troops amidst the civil war, as well as the more aggressive use of air power, was designed to undermine the Egyptian influence over the YAR. We may talk of 'the South Arabian campaign', but we are faced with two distinct elements to it: the covert involvement in the civil war, and the overt efforts to dispel insurgents from Aden and the FSA. Holistically, they presaged significant transformations in how the British conducted counter-insurgency, largely via the political primacy achieved in regard to

strategic imperatives, and reveal a military persistently on the back foot, grappling with strategic coherence.

The Political Response

The most influential British political actors in the early years of the campaign coalesced into the so-called ‘Aden Group’ of hawkish ministers in the Conservative governments of Harold Macmillan and then Alec Douglas-Home. The cabal were, in Clive Jones’ words, ‘the direct descendants of the Suez Group’ who had pushed so determinedly for action against Nasser in the previous decade.¹⁰ The Aden Group managed to shut the Foreign Office out of the policy-making process over Yemen and dictate an aggressive anti-Nasser, pro-royalist agenda.¹¹ The key figures in the group were Julian Amery, Minister for Aviation; Duncan Sandys, the Colonial Secretary; Peter Thorneycroft, the Defence Secretary; and Neil ‘Billy’ McClean MP, the self-styled Yemen emissary. The group saw the protection of British political, military and economic interests in South Arabia as a critical means of stemming the influence of Nasser-inspired Arab nationalism in the region. For the Aden Group, the humiliation of Suez still smarted.

¹⁰ Clive Jones, “Where the State Feared to Tread’: Britain, Britons, Covert Action and the Yemen Civil War’, *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.21 No.5 (October 2006), p.719.

¹¹ Even by late 1963 it remains unclear as to how much Foreign Secretary Rab Butler (who took over from Douglas-Home in October 1963) actually knew about the mercenary operations. In a memo to the Prime Minister, Butler argues, seemingly unaware of the sanctioning of secret operations, that ‘we should not as a Government, either overtly or covertly, get involved with the internal Yemeni situation.’ *The National Archives* (hereafter *TNA*), Kew, London, PREM 11/4928, ‘Secret: From Foreign Secretary to PM, 21 November 1963.’

The group tried to push Prime Minister Harold Macmillan into granting the royalists greater British support in order to defeat the republicans, encouraged by the dispatches of Neil McClean from Yemen and by their Jordanian and Saudi allies in the region.¹² A more sceptical Foreign Secretary, Alec Douglas-Home, still maintained that the royalist cause was already lost and that overt British involvement would needlessly aggravate Egypt. On 7 January 1963 the Cabinet's Overseas and Defence Committee, dominated by the Aden Group and heavily influenced by McClean's report of the situation on the ground in Yemen, decided to recommend to full Cabinet that the British government not formally recognise the establishment of the YAR and to secretly supply the royalists with arms and supplies. Macmillan, whose instinctive suspicion of Nasser helped attain full Cabinet approval of the recommendation, would only later acknowledge in his memoirs that by early 1963 he had: 'agreed to prepare defensive measures in case Aden or the Protectorates were openly attacked and meanwhile *to take such other action as might seem justifiable*.'¹³ These 'such other actions' that Macmillan approved included the deployment of mercenary special forces units inside the YAR despite an official policy of non-intervention. Yet Macmillan also wanted an insurance policy should the lid be blown on the covert mission. By early October 1962 he requested of Defence Minister Peter Thorneycroft that he 'arrange for the Chiefs of Staff to consider our

¹² In one dispatch back to London, McClean assured Whitehall that the Republican government of Sallal was 'utterly unacceptable to almost all Yemenis,' and spuriously claimed that if it were not for copious Egyptian support for the YAR, then 'the (royalist) tribes might win in a week or so.' *TNA*, DEFE 13/398, 'Top Secret: From Amman, To Foreign Office.' For the full text of McClean's final report see *TNA*, DEFE 13/398, 'Report on Visit to the Yemen, 27-30 October 1962 by Lt-Col. Neil McClean, DSO, MP.'

¹³ Harold Macmillan, *At the End of the Day, 1961-63* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p.267 (emphasis added). For a detailed assessment of Macmillan's decision-making regarding Nasser and the wider Middle East see Stephen Blackwell, 'Pursuing Nasser: The Macmillan Government and the Management of British Policy Towards the Middle East Cold War, 1957-63', *Cold War History*, Vol.4 No.3 (April 2004), pp.85-104.

military resources *should we be driven to adopt an overt policy*.¹⁴ Despite keeping an option open on a fully-fledged military deployment, the Colonial Office under Sandys turned a blind eye to the covert operations, whilst the Foreign Office became increasingly isolated in its attempts to rein in unlicensed action.¹⁵ This became a significantly more difficult task after 23 February 1963 when British positions within the FSA were attacked for the first time by Yemeni tribesmen, coinciding with a sizeable offensive by the Egyptians against royalist positions. This prompted the Aden Group to push for an outright counter-insurgency offensive.

The one moment that cast aside any political misgivings about stemming the republican tide came with the attempted assassination of the British High Commissioner to the FSA, Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, in a grenade attack at Khormaksar airport on 10 December 1963. The attack, carried out by one insurgent but orchestrated by the nascent NLF, convinced a previously sceptical Alec Douglas-Home, now the Prime Minister, of the need to tackle republican aggression both within and outside the borders of the FSA. A state of emergency was declared within the Federation after the failed assassination effort, and Trevaskis stepped up efforts in Aden to pressure London into firmly committing sizeable amounts of military supplies above and beyond the existing covert programme of arming friendly tribal groups.¹⁶ On 23 April 1964 the Cabinet's Defence

¹⁴ TNA, DEFE 13/398, 'Minute from the Prime Minister to Minister of Defence, 6 October 1962.' The Chiefs of Staff duly obliged the Prime Minister's wishes – see TNA, DEFE 13/398, 'Yemen Situation: Our Military Resources if Driven to Adopt an Overt Policy.'

¹⁵ Clive Jones, 'Among Ministers, Mavericks and Mandarins: Britain, Covert Action and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-64', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.40 No.1 (January 2004), p.103.

¹⁶ Spencer Mawby, 'The Clandestine Defence of Empire: British Special Operations in Yemen, 1951-64', *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.17 No.3 (Autumn 2002), p.121.

and Overseas Policy Committee again took a hawkish stance and endorsed many proposes enshrined in a document produced by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, entitled 'Yemen: Range of Possible Courses of Action Open to Us.' Recommendations approved by the committee included mine-laying in Aden harbour (Operation Eggshell), distributing an increased amount of arms to tribal allies (Operation Stirrup), and authorising the mercenary squads to engage in acts of sabotage (Operation Bangle). The assassination of key insurgent leaders and Egyptian intelligence officers advising the military hierarchy of the YAR was, however, ruled out, against the wishes of the Chiefs of Staff.¹⁷ This course of action makes Douglas-Home's explicit confirmation to the House of Commons on 14 May 1964 that 'our policy towards the Yemen is one of non-intervention' even more discreditable.¹⁸

The political emphasis on covert operations was heightened in March 1964 when the RAF's bombing of the republican fort at Harib resulted in civilian deaths. This offensive use of air power was met with international opprobrium and served as a warning to the British of the political dangers posed by the utilisation of overt levels of force in Yemen's civil conflict. Even the use of overt force during the campaign in Aden itself was blunted by a difficult urban operational environment and the constant stream of Egyptian supplies to the insurgents. With their hands tied in one conflict, and a worsening situation in the other, it is little surprise that Whitehall sought a political escape from the impasse. Payments from the British government to the FSA rose year-

¹⁷ TNA, DEFE 13/569, 'Yemen: Range of Possibilities Open to Us', Defence and Overseas Policy Committee discussion paper, 23 April 1964.

¹⁸ *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, 14 May 1964, Vol.695, Col.605.

on-year, as Whitehall attempted to shift the burden of defeating the insurgent and military enemies of the FSA to the federal leaders themselves – a precedent perhaps for a future process of ‘Ulsterisation’ in Northern Ireland. Payments increased from £4million in 1962, to £10million in 1963, to £14million in 1964, peaking at £18million in 1965 and 1966, a significant proportion of which was ring-fenced for training the South Arabian Army (SAA).¹⁹ As the British required the SAA to step-up their security responsibilities, Whitehall was preparing to step-down from its political commitment to the FSA. A conference held in London in June 1964 brought together the Douglas-Home government and tribal representatives of the Federation. It settled on an agreement that full independence would be granted to the FSA no later than 1968.²⁰ Three months after this accord had been attained the Tories left office, narrowly beaten by Harold Wilson’s Labour Party in the general election. The accession of the Wilson government encouraged, in Fred Halliday’s words, ‘illusions of radical reform’ in relation to colonial dependencies, especially in Aden. However, the only difference between the Conservative and Labour government’s approach to the conflict in Yemen, as Halliday goes on to argue, was that the Wilson administration was ‘more aware of objective difficulties and more able to put on a conciliatory face.’²¹ Wilson maintained the Tories’ line of none recognition for the YAR, and shared their predilection for sanctioning

¹⁹ Anthony Verrier, ‘British Military Policy on Arabia: Some Lessons for the Future’, *RUSI Journal*, Vol.112 No.648 (November 1967), p.351.

²⁰ For the full text of the conference report see, *TNA*, DEFE 13/570, ‘South Arabia Conference Report, 29 June 1964.’ Interestingly, the Colonial Secretary, Duncan Sandys, had advised the Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee early in June that he felt the Federation had to move ‘towards complete independence within a few years.’ This opinion was rejected at the time, yet adopted as government policy just three weeks later. See *TNA*, DEFE 13/569, ‘Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, 25th meeting, 3 June 1964.’

²¹ Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p.201.

covert operations when required.²² Labour offered no radical alternative to Yemeni policies that the Conservatives had, but this is not surprising given Douglas-Home's existing political concession that withdrawal from South Arabia was necessary and a timetable put in place. Initial Labour intentions to maintain a military base in Aden even after a large-scale withdrawal were abruptly halted with the sudden announcement in a February 1966 Defence White Paper that the Aden base would be abandoned, as would all British military commitments east of Suez. The plan to withdraw from Aden was brought forward a year to late 1967, marking a political acceptance of the now absent imperative to maintain a large military base in a country in the midst of both a civil war and an insurgency at a time when decolonisation had rendered the need for a major forward operating post in the Middle East anachronistic.²³ However, the abandonment of the Aden base by the Wilson government is not as strategically short-sighted as it may appear when seen in the context of the newly obtained base of Diego Garcia. The acquisition of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in November 1965 had been transformed into a military base of key Cold War strategic value as it was capable of launching British (and later American) aircraft within flying range of the Middle *and* Far East. This dual function of Diego Garcia must understandably have alleviated fears in the Ministry of Defence of losing strategic reach should Aden be abandoned. Indeed, Defence Secretary Denis Healey would later admit that the maintenance of the military base in Aden was 'out of all proportion to the gain', and defended the political decision to withdraw without defeating the insurgency by stating that 'all alternatives would have

²² Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War*, p.188.

²³ For a detailed analysis of the implications and consequences of British withdrawal east of Suez see William Roger Louis, 'The British Withdrawal from the Gulf, 1967-71', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.31 No.1 (January 2003), pp.83-108.

been worse' given the inability to find a constitutional compromise between the seemingly irreconcilable tribes of the Federation.²⁴

Many fingers have been pointed at the Wilson government for its seemingly alacritous abandonment of Aden. David Ledger accuses Labour of taking 'the road to ruin... with scarcely a backward glance.'²⁵ In a similar vein, Thomas Mockaitis, forgetting the previous Conservative promise to leave Aden, quite wrongly asserts that: 'in no previous internal conflict had a change of government led to a reversal of policy in the middle of a campaign...'²⁶ Yet such criticisms miss several crucial political points. Firstly, they overlook the omnipresence of the sterling crisis of the late 1960s and how its financial implications permeated all aspects of not only domestic spending but defence spending too, rendering expensive overseas military campaigns unviable - the British military presence and operations east of Suez, including Aden, were costing £35million per year by 1966.²⁷ As Philip Darby points out, 'viewed sympathetically the 1966 White Paper may be regarded as a reasonable compromise between political exigency and economic necessity.'²⁸ Secondly, when viewed in the lineage of political management of counter-insurgency campaigns, Wilson's execution of the withdrawal from Aden mirrors previous examples, as witnessed in Malaya and Kenya, of the British withdrawing all troops *before* formally handing over the reins of political power. However, where

²⁴ Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life* (London: Penguin, 1990), p.284.

²⁵ David Ledger, *Shifting Sands: The British in South Arabia* (London: Peninsular Publishing, 1983), p.61.

²⁶ Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency*, p.66.

²⁷ Hugh Hanning, 'Britain East of Suez: Facts and Figures', *International Affairs*, Vol.42 No.2 (April 1966), p.253.

²⁸ Philip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-68* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p.304.

Wilson is extremely culpable is his decision to retreat from South Arabia in 1966 bucked the equally important linear trend witnessed in British counter-insurgency, namely that troops are only withdrawn once a politically acceptable post-colonial authority is in place (admittedly a negligible possibility given the uncomfortable political amalgam that was the FSA) and only when the military situation is significantly under control with the insurgent threat perceivably neutered and indigenous forces able to contain any remnants of the threat (a more probable possibility, but one requiring solid political and economic backing in order to undertake effective host nation security force training). Consequentially, this process of decision-making politicised the exit strategy from a counter-insurgency campaign on a scale not seen before. Domestic considerations, combined with a politically expedient desire to relieve Britain of expensive and seemingly prolonged duties in one of the last troublesome colonial campaigns, witnessed the political trump the military for the first time in post-war British counter-insurgency. All counter-insurgency is political, yet previous political means had been to meet military ends. Not in Yemen. Seemingly abandoned by their political masters, the military were forced into a humiliating retreat, but not before their operational performance had set counter-insurgency precedents of their own.

The Military Response

The two distinct elements to the military campaign in South Arabia, the public and the private wars, made for two distinct strategies and ultimately two distinct outcomes. The

covert operations undertaken by the British Mercenary Organisation (BMO) successfully aided the royalist forces in taking back significant portions of territory lost to the republicans. With a restricted purview the BMO can perceivably be held to have met its goal of helping stem the military tide of the Egyptian-backed army of the YAR in the South Arabian hinterland. Their regular army comrades fighting the ‘conventional’ counter-insurgency campaign in Aden and the troublesome tribal regions of the FSA can point to particular successes and to a tactically flexible performance required of large-scale parallel urban and rural counter-insurgency campaigns, however the undiminished insurgent strength, fed by the public and protracted timetable for British departure, ensured that the military strategy never attained a level of cogent application.

Political pressure from the Aden Group fomented the emergence of a covert military unit that was hoped could balance the political desire to retard Nasserism in South Arabia whilst shrouding notions of direct British involvement in the civil war, circumventing the constraints on overt force imposed by the legacy of Suez. A meeting in April 1963 at White’s Club in London sealed the clandestine deployment of special forces to Yemen. Present at this meeting was Julian Amery, leading member of the Aden Group; Colonel David Stirling, founder of the SAS; Colonel Brian Franks, Commandant of 22 SAS; and crucially, Alec Douglas-Home, the Foreign Secretary, whose very presence at the meeting again undermines his later denials of any covert British involvement in Yemen.²⁹ Soon after the meeting secretly sanctioned deliveries of several million pounds worth of light weapons were made to royalist forces, later followed by the secret

²⁹ Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, p.55.

deployment of the BMO itself, partially pay-rolled by the Saudi royal family and in 1964 headed by Colonel David Smiley. Smiley himself noted that ‘at the height of the mercenary effort, when I was commanding them, they [the BMO] never numbered more than 48, of whom 30 were French or Belgian and 18 British.’³⁰ The involvement of French mercenaries stems from their experience in Algeria and de Gaulle’s desire to help undermine Nasser’s influence in the Arab world as revenge for Egypt’s support for the Algerian FLN insurgent group.³¹ Yet it is significant, as Smiley pointed out, that the BMO were there purely to ‘advise the commanders (of the royalist forces), train their troops and provide communication and medical services... It is important to realise that none of the mercenaries actually fought in the war...’³² This advice and training under Smiley’s leadership appeared to pay off. By 1964 the royalists had recaptured large swathes of territory lost in the previous year. However, despite undertaking Smiley’s imperative of severing or disrupting the Egyptian supply lines to their republican allies, Nasser’s significant escalation of Egyptian involvement in 1964 nullified the tactical intuition of several dozen British mercenaries. This most intriguing of British counter-insurgency missions - covert and non-combative – was exposed and ostensibly finished by its exposure in an Egyptian newspaper, and subsequently the *Sunday Times*, which reproduced five letters written by members of the BMO operating in Yemen and acknowledging its covert mission.³³ Yet one of the most significant ramifications that the politically-motivated covert operation created was a critical rupture between the civil

³⁰ Smiley, *Arabian Assignment*, p.154. Also see Peter de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), ch.13 & 14.

³¹ Jones, ‘Where the State Feared to Tread’, p.728.

³² Smiley, *Arabian Assignment*, p.154.

³³ Stephen Dorril, *MI6: Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty’s Secret Intelligence Service* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), p.693.

and military hierarchy in Whitehall. Declassified documents reveal that the most senior military commander, the Chief of the Defence Staff, Earl Mountbatten, did not recommend the adoption of a mercenary strategy, arguing to the Prime Minister that he saw ‘no prospect of any politically acceptable intervention that would have the significant effect other than to make the regime (in the YAR) more popular,’ adding that he doubted ‘whether any undercover action... could have anything other than nuisance value.’³⁴ Even the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshall Sir Thomas Pike, felt obliged to rubbish Neil McClean’s telegrams from inside Yemen to Defence Minister Peter Thorneycroft, arguing that they ‘gave a different impression from what is being reported in Taiz,’ and that he found it rather strange that ‘the only eye witness information available to us... should come from a back-bench Member of Parliament.’³⁵ Despite these critical divisions, the covert mission went ahead, against the advice of senior military personnel. Yet the military hierarchy did have a greater input into the planning and execution of the overt campaign in the FSA.

The first demonstration of overt force by the regular British army came with Operation Nutcracker in January 1964 as they launched an offensive against dissident tribal groups in the Radfan mountain range. The Federal government appealed to the British for a sizeable military presence to be sent to the region, epicentre of rural revolt towards the Federation. The army created the so-called ‘Radforce’, a sizeable yet eclectic mix of troops from the 16/5th Queen’s Royal Lancers, the Royal Engineers, the Royal Horse

³⁴ TNA, DEFE 13/398, ‘Minute to the Prime Minister, from CDS, 22 October 1962.’

³⁵ TNA, DEFE 13/398, ‘Secret: From Air Ministry, To Minister of Defence, 7 November 1962.’

Artillery, the Royal Marines, the Parachute Regiment and the SAS.³⁶ Small scale special forces operations were conducted alongside larger regular army operations during the five week operation that was painstakingly conducted, taking a single mountain at a time, pushing the rebels out of the area and subduing a nascent rural insurgency. Operation Nutcracker was the first major counter-insurgency operation that had received intense media coverage. Several camera crews and up to seventy newspaper correspondents travelled to the Radfan to cover the unfolding military campaign in rural South Arabia – a campaign whose emphasis lay almost exclusively on the kinetic elements of engaging the tribal rebels and remained disengaged from the notion of ‘hearts and minds’.³⁷ This resulted in a disaffected local populace in the Radfan, and when combined with the few resources that were being diverted to the area despite the military success of Nutcracker, made for a continuously problematic hotspot. The lack of Federal control over Radfan resulted in another major rural offensive being undertaken in spring 1964. Operation Cap Badge was the second demonstration of the British willingness to utilise its full military potential to shore up the FSA, yet it revealed how even this strategically important region, close to the YAR border and location of the Dhala Road, the only major route from the hinterland into Aden, was persistently vulnerable to lawlessness, ambush and supply route disruption. However, the Radfan dissidents proved illusive in the inhospitable mountainous terrain, and were able to maintain cross-border safe havens in the YAR from which to retreat and plan attacks on the British and FSA forces. Despite superior numbers and firepower, the Radforce proved less mobile, too dependent on limited air power capacities and

³⁶ Anthony Kemp, *The SAS: Savage Wars of Peace, 1947 to the Present* (London: Penguin, 2001), p.75.

³⁷ Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency*, p.55.

ultimately unable to stem the Egyptian supplies to the tribes. Despite some individual successes, the rural counter-insurgency campaign remained unable to suppress dissident rebellion in the face of a porous border, difficult operational conditions – meteorologically and logistically – and an insurgent enemy keen to avoid outright confrontation and test the longevity of British resistance.³⁸ A different set of circumstances faced the military fighting the urban campaign, but they too had to accept a similar outcome.

With its maze of crowded back streets, and its array of bazaars, mosques and cafes, Aden did not suit itself to the conduct of urban counter-insurgency. It offered an assortment of hiding places and concealments for an insurgent group with a preference for ambush and assassination. Once the NLF began its concerted campaign of urban insurgency inside Aden in 1964, the British were on the backfoot and were forced to launch a defensive urban counter-insurgency campaign (unlike Operation Hammer in Nairobi during the suppression of Mau Mau, which was pre-emptive and offensive). The dense population clusters, combined with the NLF's proclivity to attack British troops in public places so as to blend back into a crowd, ensured that urban patrolling was fraught with dangers for British service personnel. Stop-and-search checkpoints in known areas of insurgent support lacked both nuance and efficiency.³⁹ The stream of smuggled weapons to the NLF in the city emboldened the group into making more brazen and public attacks. Rules of Engagement (RoE) in Aden were formalised on the so-called

³⁸ For a detailed narrative and analysis of Operation 'Nutcracker' and Operation 'Cap Badge' see Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, ch.4 and 5. For an official military analysis of the latter stages of the Radfan campaign see, TNA, AIR 23/8637, 'Operations in the Radfan, 14 April-30 June 1964. Report by HQ MELF.'

³⁹ Stephen Harper, *Last Sunset: What Happened in Aden* (London: Collins, 1978), p.56.

‘Blue Card’ distributed to all soldiers, enshrining the procedure of issuing a verbal warning (in English and Arabic) before resorting to gunfire. These procedures, embodying in theory the notions of minimum force, were difficult to transpose into practice in the confusing, crowded surroundings of Aden.

One of the more innovative counter-measures the British took to urban insurgency was a perverted form of the pseudo-gang technique. Instead of ‘turning’ captured insurgents into reformed units of counter-insurgents, the SAS pioneered so-called ‘keeni meeni’ operations (from the Swahili phrase to describe a snakes’ slither through the grass). Based at Ballycastle House on the base at RAF Khormaksar, SAS operatives trained in close quarter combat would don Arab dress with concealed weapons. Deploying to the areas of Aden synonymous with insurgent support, the keeni meeni operatives would be dispatched to blend in with the populace and then kill, snatch or interrogate suspected insurgents. As Anthony Kemp puts it, ‘essentially the purpose was to meet terrorism with terrorism.’⁴⁰ Despite the unique approach, the keeni meeni operations produced few discernable results in Aden, were plagued by ‘friendly fire’ incidents as regular army troops would occasionally mistake the operatives for insurgents, and were, in Jonathan Walker’s opinion, ‘compromised by their wide territorial scope and the fact that they rarely dovetailed with the special operations of the regular army units.’⁴¹

⁴⁰ Kemp, *The SAS*, p.78.

⁴¹ Walker, *The Aden Insurgency*, p.191.

Military command of operations in Aden lay with a Security Commander. This post, initially filled by the Commander of the Aden Brigade from 1963, was subsumed under the command of the General Officer Commanding (GOC) Middle East Land Forces (MELF) in 1965, two years after major counter-insurgency operations began.⁴² The Security Commander, as the most senior military figure in the campaign had no political powers commensurate with a Templer-esque Director of Operations given the FSA's quasi autonomous position as a British Protectorate and not a colony. It was also not until 1965 that an effective civil-military structure was established – another demonstration of belated institutional adaptation in an insurgency environment. A Security Policy Committee was chaired by the High Commissioner and attended by the Federal Minister for Internal Security, the Commander-in-Chief Middle East, and the Security Commander, in an attempt to orchestrate the campaign. Under this committee sat the Security Committee, constitutive of the Deputy High Commissioner, Deputy GOC MELF, and crucially the Chiefs of Police, Intelligence, and the Aden and Federal Governments. This committee was able to deal with operational concerns and issues, as opposed to the strategic remit of the Security Policy Committee.⁴³

However, one of the main issues that beset the Security Policy Committee was the nature of the relationship between the British army and the South Arabian army – an amalgamation of the Federal Regular Army and the Federal National Guard in 1967. Although responsible for their training and much of their funding, the British army never

⁴² Paget, *Last Post*, p.145.

⁴³ Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency*, p.58.

fully trusted the SAA, harbouring suspicions of its professionalism and loyalty. Intelligence channels between the two armies were thus sparse as the NLF was known to have infiltrated the ranks of the SAA.⁴⁴ Unlike in Malaya and Kenya where indigenous troops proved crucial to the wider counter-insurgency campaign, the role of the army in South Arabia frustrated the British. Caught in a paradox between the internal ineptitude of reliance on the SAA and the international condemnation that a heavy British deployment in the Middle East would create, the British never found a truly coherent balance, resulting in a stymied military campaign. The mutiny of the South Arabian and Aden Armed Police, provoking the siege of the Crater district of Aden and its subsequent retaking by the 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders commanded by the infamous Lt-Colonel Colin ‘Mad Mitch’ Mitchell in June-July 1967, crystallised fears over indigenous armed force reliability.

By June 1967 the British army had already passed security responsibility for the FSA interior to the SAA in accordance with the imminent politically-dictated withdrawal timetable. The British retreated to form a defensive perimeter around Aden as troops became sitting targets for reprisal attacks by insurgents with near impunity such was the environment of lawlessness inspired by the schedule of British military departure. Such a scenario would find echoes in Basra forty years later. Fears over the dependability of the post-transition SAA were realised on the eve of British withdrawal when the SAA declared allegiance to the NLF. The ignominy of the retreat of the British forces – conducted by the largest naval task force assembled by the British since the Suez

⁴⁴ Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, p.239.

invasion, totalling twenty-four ships⁴⁵ - was compounded by the knowledge that the fundamental strategic goal of the Aden military mission, to secure the Protectorate for the FSA, was not achieved. The indigenous army it had trained to aid it in this mission had mutinied, and left the city in the hands of the insurgents it had spent the last four years battling against. Prime Minister Harold Wilson failed to see the strategic implication of the withdrawal when all he recalled of the retreat from Aden in his memoirs was that it was 'successfully accomplished... in good order with no loss of life.'⁴⁶ The swift collapse of the FSA soon after the British departure sealed the ostensible failure of the British military mission – the first post-war counter-insurgency 'defeat' since Palestine. Subjugated to political demands, and facing a well-supplied insurgent enemy, the British military were unable to fulfil the grand strategic mission set them. This failure was caused to a significant extent by the absence of an effective intelligence-gathering and dissemination network.

Intelligence in South Arabia and Aden

Before the coup in 1962 and the establishment of the YAR, British intelligence in Yemen had been the responsibility of MI5 and the Aden Intelligence Centre who were fed information by the local Special Branch. Despite this, developments in the north came as a surprise, with little foresight into the Yemeni army's revolutionary intentions.

⁴⁵ Ledger, *Shifting Sands*, p.199.

⁴⁶ Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-70: A Personal Record* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971), p.445.

This was in part exacerbated in the immediate post-revolution period by the Joint Intelligence Committee's refusal to sanction reconnaissance flights over Yemen to monitor the Egyptian build-up, consequently establishing intelligence-gathering parameters that deemed there was 'no justification' for activity outside the borders of the Protectorates.⁴⁷ The seeming vacuum of British intelligence in the wake of the revolution generated particular worry at the CIA's estimation that within a week of the coup Abdullah al-Sallal's new regime would be receiving support from up to twelve thousand Egyptian troops in the spirit of pan-Arab nationalist solidarity.⁴⁸ However, CIA reports were distrusted as overly stating the strength of the Egyptian influence as a means of discouraging British involvement in the civil war.⁴⁹ Significantly, at the time of the revolution in September 1962, there was just one MI6 officer stationed in Aden.⁵⁰ This paucity of trained intelligence operatives ensured that Britain's covert involvement in the civil war had to be undertaken by remnants of the SAS and not SIS given the timescale that would have been required to gather the requisite officers and resources in the country. The Director of MI6, Sir Dick White, was personally sceptical of the Aden Group's interventionist approach to Yemen and fended off attempts to engage MI6 in the campaign, arguing that the organisation should 'just stick to the job of intelligence gathering.'⁵¹ However, this did not stop Prime Minister Harold Macmillan from forming an unofficial Yemen intelligence taskforce, containing several retired senior MI6 officers with significant regional experience, to advise him on the clandestine aspects of the campaign. It is difficult to assess whether it was despite or due to MI6's backseat role

⁴⁷ TNA, DEFE 13/398, 'Yemen Situation: Recommended Action.'

⁴⁸ Dorril, *MI6*, p.679.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.682.

⁵⁰ Jones, 'Where the State Feared to Tread', p.721.

⁵¹ Quoted in Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, p.55.

in the covert campaign in Yemen that the clandestine efforts in support of the royalists against the republican forces were hampered by a lack of effective and accurate intelligence. For example, air strikes against arms caravans crossing into the FSA could not be sanctioned as operatives on the ground could not distinguish between them and ordinary caravans of legitimate goods. Consequentially, the BMOs capacity to stem the flow of arms to aid the nascent insurgency in the Radfan and Aden was severely restricted.⁵² What intelligence that was gathered by the SAS in known insurgent strongholds was often bought off locals in return for ‘thirty-thirty-thirty’ – thirty thousand *ryals*, thirty rifles and thirty boxes of ammunition.⁵³ This system of paying for intelligence ran parallel to a process of buying the loyalty of tribal leaders in rebellious areas in an attempt to quell subversion. It is estimated that up to £30million was spent on this informal programme of securing intelligence and loyalty, although the quality of both these factors was questionable given that many of the weapons given by the British were sold on to the republicans by expedient, even entrepreneurial, tribesmen.⁵⁴

A lack of useable intelligence not only hampered the clandestine military efforts, but the overt military campaign too. Even the Commander in Chief of British Forces in the Middle East bemoaned the fact that during the Radfan operations, ‘one of the greatest difficulties in using limited force against specific military targets is the lack of timely intelligence.’⁵⁵ The Chief of the Defence Staff, Earl Mountbatten, felt compelled to express the collective concerns of the Chiefs of Staff at the shortfall of intelligence

⁵² Jones, ‘Ministers, Mavericks and Mandarins’, p.108 & 110.

⁵³ Ken Connor, *Ghost Force: The Secret History of the SAS* (London: Cassell, 1998), p.192.

⁵⁴ Dorril, *MI6*, p.692.

⁵⁵ TNA, DEFE 13/569, ‘Top Secret: From CINC MIDEAST, To MOD, UK, 16 April 1964.’

officers in the FSA and Aden in a letter to Defence Secretary Denis Healey in early 1965. He revealed that the JIC had held a special meeting solely to discuss the issue, and went on to argue that unless the intelligence gap was breached, ‘our large military and financial outlay for countering insurgency... is going to be prejudiced.’⁵⁶ This was perhaps the one factor the overt and covert campaigns had in common that most hampered their respective strategic goals.

Further setbacks to an efficient intelligence set-up in South Arabia remained the obfuscation of a discernable structure and inter-agency rivalry, each earnestly protecting the intelligence gathered by their own fiefdoms, wary of that produced by each other. Despite the SAS operatives in the BMO gathering local intelligence on the front line of the civil war, MI6 still remained the primary intelligence gatekeeper, controlling the flow of intelligence between SAS patrols unable to remain in touch with each other due to a lack of communication equipment. In Clive Jones’ opinion, ‘the reluctance to make better use of the reports produced by BMO operatives remains *the* intelligence failure of the British...’⁵⁷ The nexus of the intelligence network in South Arabia was the Aden Intelligence Centre (AIC). Containing about thirty intelligence officers, the AIC coalesced intelligence representatives from Special Branch (perhaps the most significant intelligence gatherers within Aden itself), Military Intelligence, the Information Research Department (responsible for propaganda), MI6, and MI5. However, the AIC vied for intelligence supremacy with the FSAs own Federal Intelligence Committee

⁵⁶ TNA, DEFE 13/710, ‘From Chief of Defence Staff, To Defence Secretary, 5 February 1965.’

⁵⁷ Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War*, p.227. Original emphasis.

(FIC). A working group was established back in London by the Joint Intelligence Committee to review the intelligence structures and capabilities in South Arabia. In May 1964 it delivered a report recommending changes to the existing system; however the change of government back in Britain, combined with the incessant inter-agency rivalry ensured that the changes were never wholly implemented with any conviction.⁵⁸ Indeed, it was not until twelve months after the declaration of the Emergency that an overarching Director of Intelligence was appointed,⁵⁹ and it was not until July 1965, some eighteen months into the Emergency, that the authorities proscribed the NLF – an indication of how little intelligence the British actually had on the source or motive of the violence being directed against them.

There were two significant features of the intelligence efforts in South Arabia. First was the reliance the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) had on signals intelligence (SIGINT) to inform the British intelligence establishment of events pertaining to the Yemen civil war. Given that the only tangible human intelligence (HUMINT) capability remained several dozen mercenary special forces operatives and that there was a political reluctance to physically assign MI6 officers to the conflict area, the JIC relied heavily on intercepts of Egyptian radio traffic by a Government Communication Headquarters

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp.169-70. Although inter-agency intelligence rivalry has been a trend persistent in colonial counter-insurgency, it was arguably exacerbated in the South Arabia case firstly by the perceived legitimacy of the intelligence produced by the clandestine BMO, and secondly by the parallel British and Federal intelligence committees – an occurrence not witnessed in the colonies of Malaya and Kenya where the British exercised full political and military jurisdiction.

⁵⁹ Paget, *Last Post*, p.149.

(GCHQ) SIGINT intercept post, as well as army SIGINT units.⁶⁰ The sudden and humiliating retreat from Aden resulted in the curtailment of the GCHQ SIGINT post, unlike in other recently independent colonies, including Kenya, whereby defence agreements with politically friendly post-colonial governments legislated for the maintenance of SIGINT posts. To compensate for this abrupt end to SIGINT facilities in Aden, three GCHQ operatives were tasked prior to the withdrawal from the colony, to covertly place antennas disguised as flagpoles within the grounds of the British embassy in the city in order to intercept signals traffic even after decolonisation.⁶¹

The second feature was the NLF's deliberate targeting of the British intelligence outfit as part of its urban strategy in Aden. In late 1964 the NLF attempted to strengthen their position within the city by strangulating the British ability to infiltrate or gather intelligence on them. By mid-1966, sixteen Special Branch officers had been assassinated, stultifying the intelligence side of the urban counter-insurgency campaign and placed an additional emphasis on routine patrolling as a means of intelligence gathering in the city.⁶²

With the absence of a cultivated network of local sources, particularly after the advance notice of Britain's intention to withdraw (after which intelligence 'all but dried up' as

⁶⁰ David Easter, 'GCHQ and British External Policy in the 1960s', *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.23 No.5 (2008), p.683.

⁶¹ James Bamford, *Body of Secrets: How America's NSA and Britain's GCHQ Eavesdrop on the World* (London: Arrow Books, 2002), pp.161-2.

⁶² Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, p.141; Mockaitis, *British Counter-Insurgency*, p.59.

locals feared reprisals once the British has departed)⁶³, compounded by the parlous state of intelligence dissemination channels, the interrogation of suspects became one of the only significant methods through which to garner information on the NLF. The British operated a separate Detention Centre (at al-Mansoura) and an Interrogation Centre (at Fort Morbut). Suspects could be held at Fort Morbut for interrogation for seven days without warrant and for a further twenty-one days under the authority of a 'holding order', totalling a maximum interrogation period of twenty-eight days without charge (a period with haunting contemporary echoes) unless a 'detention order' was issued and the suspect sent to al-Mansoura. The Interrogation Centre at Fort Morbut represented a legal blackhole where 'in-depth interrogation' masked a darker form of intelligence gathering. Such activity was carried out under the protection of the original Emergency proclamation of December 1963, further enhanced by the imposition of direct rule over the Protectorates in September 1965. Claims of brutality and torture were denied by the army, yet they still refused any foreign observers to enter the Centre, including representatives of the International Red Cross and Amnesty International.⁶⁴ However, the British government partially bowed to pressure to address the allegations of abuse and commissioned Roderic Bowen QC to investigate Fort Morbut. Critically, his remit was restricted to reviewing procedural practices only, and not the actions of individual intelligence officers. The centres at Fort Morbut and al-Mansoura were operating under military and not civilian law. Bowen recommended that this legal *modus operandi* be reversed, requiring the employment of civilian interrogators at Morbut to replace the interrogators from the Counter Intelligence Company of the Aden Intelligence Corps

⁶³ Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and Their Opponents Since 1750* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), p.155.

⁶⁴ Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, p.205.

who had been the focus of accusations.⁶⁵ Bowen's eventual report concluded that although there had been 'a most regrettable failure to deal expeditiously and adequately with the allegations of cruelty' at the Interrogation Centre, 'there were no serious criticisms' to be made.⁶⁶ The commissioning of Bowen's report in the first place, combined with his rebuke (albeit a rather weak one) of interrogation procedures, encapsulates the disarray that the British intelligence system was in during the Aden campaign. With murky lines of communication, an ever decreasing circle of informers and the employment of extra-legal interrogation methods that became public knowledge, it became inevitable that the insurgent group that British and Federal intelligence community knew so little about came to elude the authorities and make irreversible inroads in both rural and urban South Arabia in the absence of an effective counter-insurgency strategy.

Insurgent Organisation

To add to the state of strategic and tactical disorder incurred by fighting concomitant urban and rural counter-insurgency campaigns that were simultaneously overt and covert, the British even faced a bifurcated 'enemy' in the open insurgency they faced in Aden and the outlying Protectorate. The National Liberation Front (NLF) was a disparate coalition of southern Yemeni militants who had transferred to the YAR after the 1962 coup. The Front for the Liberation of Occupied Southern Yemen (FLOSY) was

⁶⁵ Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, p.186.

⁶⁶ For the full text of Bowen's report see, TNA, DEFE 13/529, 'The Bowen Report.'

a breakaway insurgent group who had its ideological roots within the Socialist Party. Both groups differed in terms of their organisational structure, as well as in regard to strategic ends and tactical means. It was, however, to prove to be the NLF with which the British would come to focus their counter-insurgency efforts on as the internal power struggles of the fractured insurgent movement shifted in their favour.

On 14 October 1963 the NLF declared their official revolt against British rule in South Arabia. The group forged an agglomeration of ten various clandestine groups, including pro-YAR tribal groups within the FSA, republican FSA army officers, middle class intellectuals, and mercenaries.⁶⁷ They were, however, unified in their nationalism and in their mutual desire to rid south Yemen of British control and influence. The NLF was split into three main branches. It maintained a central political body (*Maktab Siyasi*); a financial body (*Jihaz Mali*); and a military body (*Jihaz Askari*), the latter element responsible for funding, training and supplying the NLF Liberation Army – the actual insurgent fighters.⁶⁸ These insurgents adopted a cell-based organisational system, autonomous but for ‘link men’ who kept cells informed of each others actions and future plans.⁶⁹

A desire to achieve a unity of effort against the British presence culminated in January 1965, with a merger between the NLF and a nascent breakaway group, the Organisation

⁶⁷ Halliday, *Arabian Without Sultans*, p.190.

⁶⁸ Joseph Kostiner, *The Struggle for South Yemen* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1984), p.58.

⁶⁹ Paget, *Last Post*, p.116.

of the Liberation of the Occupied South (OLOS), to form FLOS Y. This union was short-lived, as the NLF quickly reasserted its independence from FLOS Y over divergences of strategic and tactical direction amongst the leading figures of the two branches.⁷⁰ FLOS Y remained determined to augment its own strongholds and pursue a separate path to insurgent victory. To emerge from its political organisation during 1966 was a quasi-autonomous armed wing, the Popular Organisation of Revolutionary Forces (PORF). PORF was heavily influenced by the Egyptians, who provided the bulk of the group's training. In terms of fighting strength, PORF was constitutive of between nine and twelve armed units, made up of between twelve and thirty men each. These units operated almost exclusively in Aden, whereas other armed elements of FLOS Y took charge of insurgent operations elsewhere in the Federation.⁷¹ Organisationally diverse from each other, FLOS Y and the NLF crucially deviated on strategic vision, a factor that could have been exploited further, had the British not been subsumed in their own strategic dilemma.

Insurgent Strategy and Tactics

The NLF, as the primary manifestation of insurgent opposition against the British, was not an entrenched social movement, and neither was it driven by stringent operational plans to drive the British out. Instead, the NLF adopted a long-term strategy of

⁷⁰ Kostiner, *The Struggle for South Yemen*, p.115.

⁷¹ Ibid, p.155.

harassment, assassination, sabotage and terrorism. With overt Egyptian support, the NLF insurgency may have been scrappy but it was certainly potent.

By late 1963 arms were permeating the border from the YAR into the FSA to aid the NLFs initial insurgent front in the Radfan mountains. The fulcrum of the NLFs rural strategy was to cut the Dhala road, the main artery from Aden to the interior of the Federation, thereby severing British ability to deploy forces to the hinterland and maintain control. The NLF blockaded the road for three months before the British launched Operation Nutcracker to depose them. Yet the NLF acknowledged the need to assert a national presence if their ultimate strategic goal was to be met. Parallel to their rural activities, they launched an urban insurgency inside Aden, opening a new flank in the insurgency. The main plank to the urban platform was a targeted campaign of assassination against pillars of British control. The audacious assassination attempt against High Commissioner Kennedy Trevaskis marked the explosive beginning of the official Emergency in Aden and the FSA, whilst the aforementioned targeting of the Aden Special Branch revealed an acute acknowledgment on the NLFs part as to the importance of nullifying British intelligence capabilities. High profile victims of the NLFs campaign against British security and political figures included Sir Arthur Charles, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly (shot as he left his local tennis club), and Harry Barrie, Deputy Head of Aden Special Branch (shot in his car as he waited at a set of traffic lights).⁷²

⁷² Ledger, *Shifting Sands*, p.65.

In June 1965 the NLF decreed its National Charter, a self-styled manifesto and ideological programme, espousing the desire to turn the national revolution into a social one in a country rid of colonial control. By 1966 these ideals were transmuted into tangible policies imminently actionable as the British announced their intention to stage a prolonged withdrawal. From the recommendations of the 1966 White Paper stemmed, in the words of journalist Stephen Harper, ‘the decision (by the NLF) to give the British a send-off with bombs and bullets, and to hell with conferences and documents.’⁷³ At a stroke, London had granted the NLF *carte blanche* to step up their insurgent campaign against an army with one eye on its looming departure and against an indigenous intelligence network soon to be isolated from its chief guardian. As Joseph Kostiner has argued, the NLFs greatest achievement as an insurgent movement ‘seems to have been its utilisation of the “fluidity of force” tactics, namely the spreading of fighting in order to achieve a maximum number of attacks on a given area...’⁷⁴ By opening two distinct fronts to the insurgency the NLF was able to forge an extensive and effective strategy that drained British resources and struck at the heart of their counter-insurgency apparatus. Sustaining this insurgent strategy was its disparate and dispersed internal support network within Aden and the wider Federation.

⁷³ Harper, *Last Sunset*, p.59.

⁷⁴ Kostiner, *The Struggle for South Yemen*, p.72.

Internal Insurgent Support

The complex tribal system in the Yemeni hinterland ensured that there was no logical pattern of insurgent support, with the loyalty of tribal leaders often being bought by both insurgent and counter-insurgent forces. Internal support for FLOSY stemmed primarily from within Aden, in contrast to the NLF who controlled most western and central parts of the FSA interior, although pockets of FLOSY support in these regions did give it access to one of the main through roads to Aden, enabling them to keep their urban insurgency well supplied.⁷⁵ FLOSY also had strongholds in the East Aden Protectorates (EAP). However, the crucial factor that affected levels of internal support for the two insurgent groups was the location of their respective leaders. The FLOSY hierarchy directed its campaign either from Egypt or over the border in the YAR in contrast to the NLF's leaders who based themselves within the FSA. This generated a general perspective amongst the wider population of South Arabia, particularly those sympathetic to the republican cause, that the NLF was an organic indigenous movement with a national presence, whereas FLOSY appeared as Egyptian puppets, propagating Nasser's agenda in the country.⁷⁶ Paradoxically, the greatest source of external support that bestowed a degree of insurgent effectiveness upon FLOSY actually provoked a haemorrhaging of internal support for their movement – a significant hindrance once the NLF and FLOSY turned their guns on each other as the British withdrawal sparked a power grab by the insurgent victors in the subsequent power vacuum.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ledger, *Shifting Sands*, p.176.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.176.

⁷⁷ Kostiner, *The Struggle for South Yemen*, p.161.

External Insurgent Support

More than in any other counter-insurgency campaign in post-war British history, the external support dynamic that played out in South Arabia was so significant as to render it crucial to the actual outcome of the conflict. The assistance proffered by Nasser's Egypt shaped both conflicts the British found themselves embroiled in: the covert involvement in the Yemen civil war and the insurgency in Aden and the FSA. In a reverse mirroring of the participation levels of their British adversaries, the Egyptians found themselves overtly involved in assisting the republican forces in the civil war, whilst clandestinely training and funding the anti-British insurgency inside the Federation. Arguably, it was their support in the latter conflict that ultimately bore the most fruit. Although claims that 'the Yemen was Nasser's Vietnam',⁷⁸ are a little far-fetched, it was clear that in their campaign in Yemen the Egyptians 'appeared no closer to victory (in 1967)... than they had been in 1962.'⁷⁹

Egypt sent their first one hundred troops to Yemen weeks after the revolution in October 1962, causing consternation amongst the British military hierarchy.⁸⁰ By the end of the year they had sent 15,000. The Egyptian strategy during their proxy intervention in the Yemen civil war was threefold: to prop up the new republic in the name of Arab

⁷⁸ Peter Hinchcliffe, 'Introduction', in Hinchcliffe, *et al*, *Without Glory in Arabia*, p.4.

⁷⁹ David M. Witty, 'A Regular Army in Counter-Insurgency Operations: Egypt in North Yemen, 1966-67', *Journal of Military History*, Vol.65 No.2 (April 2001), p.401.

⁸⁰ Even by 5 October 1962, the British Commander in Chief in the Middle East had reported with alarm to the Chief of Defence Staff that 'there seems to be a significant Egyptian build-up' in Yemen. TNA, DEFE 13/398, 'Top Secret: From CINI MIDEAST, To MoD, London, 15 October 1962.'

nationalism; to encourage the revolution to spread from Yemen to Saudi Arabia; and to drive the British out from the south.⁸¹ Although the first and third of these goals were met, it is questionable as to the extent to which it was the Egyptian presence and effort that guaranteed the outcome. At best, the Egyptians were conduits through which the Yemeni republicans, northern regulars and southern insurgents alike, could achieve their own goals facilitated via Egyptian arms and training. As a proxy conflict it can be seen as a success. As an outright military deployment it cannot. The large Egyptian forces in the YAR, some 50,000 by 1965, left themselves open to militia ambushes on a terrain they knew little about, and failed to adequately devise a strategy capable of countering small, speedy royalist militias whose British sponsors had trained them in the ways of guerrilla fighting. In short, they sent a regular army to fight an irregular war with conventional tactics and unwieldy operational perspectives.⁸²

The British government's 1966 Defence White Paper that heralded a withdrawal from South Arabia provoked Nasser into rethinking his entire Yemen strategy and ended up altering the external influence dimension dramatically. Secure in the knowledge of a protracted British pull-out, Nasser devised a so-called 'Long Breath strategy' in the week after the British announcement, which constituted the redeployment of the bulk of the Egyptian forces in the YAR from the north closer to the southern border with the FSA, ready to exploit the impending military vacuum.⁸³ This shift did entail a reduction in the number of Egyptian troops (an intention pre-dating the White Paper), however the

⁸¹ Witty, 'A Regular Army in Counter-Insurgency Operations', p.410.

⁸² Ibid, p.418.

⁸³ O'Ballance, *The War in the Yemen*, p.156.

Egyptian strategic rethink provoked by the British announcement resulted in a sizeable offensive force being drafted onto the FSAs borders. The vultures were immediately circling the frail body of the FSA in anticipation of British life-support being withdrawn. Yet significantly, the intervention in Yemen was proving increasingly unpopular with the Egyptian population. It was expensive and was draining military resources. The cost of Egyptian involvement in Yemen came at more than just the price of domestic disgruntlement for Nasser. When Israel launched its offensive against Egypt, Syria and Jordan in June 1967 up to one third of Egypt's military was deployed in Yemen.⁸⁴ The humiliation Egypt suffered during the Six Day War prompted a chastened Nasser to initiate a withdrawal from Yemen in October of that year – a process complete by mid-December, and undertaken in the knowledge that the British had already left.

The British departure was in large part due to the potency and longevity of the urban insurgency being prosecuted in Aden by the NLF and FLOSY. The latter group's particular proximity to Nasser's regime granted them the privileged insurgent position of operating under the guardianship of a proxy state benefactor. However, even before FLOSYs creation in 1965, the Egyptians were promulgating insurgent action inside the FSA by aiding the training of NLF fighters. By 1964 'intelligence reports indicated that about two hundred Adenis had received terrorist training from Egyptian agents in the Yemen.'⁸⁵ Indeed, the Egyptian intelligence officers who undertook the tuition of republican insurgents posed the greater threat to British troops and represented the most

⁸⁴ Jones, 'Where the State Feared to Tread', p.733.

⁸⁵ Harper, *Last Sunset*, p.55.

significant aspect of the external involvement of the Egyptians, than the tens of thousands of regular troops stationed menacingly on the FSAs borders. Yet it was not just the Egyptians who staked an external claim in the insurgent cause. It was natural for the insurgents operating in the FSA to look to their republican brethren in the YAR for assistance in achieving the unity of Yemen. However, it is revealing that at first the YAR were unwilling to support or supply FSA-based insurgents as they held a desire to engender British recognition of the YAR and thus nullify any royalist opposition to the entrenchment of Yemeni republicanism. Explicit support for the NLF only came after the British began overtly supplying the royalist armed forces in the civil war in February 1963.⁸⁶ But it was not just to their ideological cohorts in the north to whom the NLF looked to garner external support. In 1965 they secured financial aid from the Arab League to procure arms and ammunition, whilst there were also intelligence reports the same year that claimed that NLF members had travelled to Cyprus to receive training in sabotage and guerrilla warfare from veterans of the EOKA insurgency campaign against the British in the mid-to-late 1950s.⁸⁷

Accumulatively, the disparate sources of external support that the anti-British insurgent groups attained significantly aided the NLF in particular to not only acquire intimate training in insurgent warfare tactics but also acquire the financial and logistical resources to perpetuate their conflict beyond any reasonable hope had they been forced to be self-sufficient, like the MRLA in Malaya or the Mau Mau in Kenya. The NLF was

⁸⁶ Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, p.189.

⁸⁷ Kostiner, *The Struggle for South Yemen*, pp.59 & 75.

wired into a wider regional body politic, was part of the grander design of pan-Arab nationalism, and thus achieved political resonance with an audience far beyond the city walls of Aden or the remote mountain regions of the South Arabian interior. Indeed, the conflict as a whole – a conflict encompassing a civil war, covert proxy involvement by regional and imperial powers, and a potent insurgency – would come to have a political resonance beyond the capitals of those countries with an immediate stake in the outcome. If the level of external support rendered to the NLF set a precedent in British counter-insurgency campaigning, then so too did the intensity of international interest and input throughout the course of the conflict.

International Context

The ramifications of civil war, insurgency and political turmoil in Yemen presented the British with not only a regional maelstrom but a growing international storm over its interference in the YAR and over its treatment of insurgents in the FSA. The interplay between the perceived communist manipulation of Nasser and American interpretations of British resurgent imperialism made for the most turbulent period of international diplomacy resultant from a British counter-insurgency campaign since the withdrawal from Palestine.

The British and American's hatched fears that the Egyptian involvement in Yemen was a plot devised with the Soviets to destabilise security in the Arabian Peninsula,⁸⁸ stemming from the knowledge that the Soviets had been selling arms to nationalist forces in Yemen since 1956.⁸⁹ Although the Soviets had an interest in the Middle East, the Kremlin seemed content to support the Egyptians efforts in South Arabia and staged no overt interference in the civil war or the insurgency. Indeed, any interest that the Kremlin paid to South Arabia was 'strategic more than ideological.'⁹⁰ The Soviets offered no alternative communist influence to the existing appeal of Nasserism, a decision understandable in light of Khrushchev's acknowledgement of Nasser's regional influence in the Middle East in the early 1960s.⁹¹

Although erstwhile Cold War allies, the American's construed British meddling in the region to represent renewed colonial muscle-flexing. As Anthony Eden's Private Secretary, Guy Millard, pointed out, in the wake of the Suez Crisis, Britain 'could never again resort to military action outside British territories without at least American acquiescence.'⁹² This truism helps characterise the attempts of the Macmillan and Douglas-Home administrations to hide their employment of covert mercenary groups in Yemen whilst simultaneously pressurising the Americans to not recognise the YAR in a

⁸⁸ Dorril, *MI6*, p.681; Jones, 'Where the State Feared to Tread', p.718.

⁸⁹ W. Taylor Fain, 'Unfortunate Arabia: The United States, Great Britain and Yemen, 1955-63', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol.12 No.2 (June 2001), p.129.

⁹⁰ John T. Ducker, 'The International Context of South Arabia and British Policy', in Hinchcliffe *et al*, *Without Glory in Arabia*, p.72.

⁹¹ For a comprehensive analysis of Soviet-Egyptian relations in relation to early proxy involvement in Yemen see Jesse Ferris, 'Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen, 1962-1963', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol.10 No.4 (2008), pp.5-36.

⁹² Quoted in Anthony Adamthwaite, 'Suez Revisited', *International Affairs*, Vol.64 No.3 (Summer 1988), p.449.

vein attempt to bolster legitimacy for their clandestine operations. In line with their vision for the development of other nations in the Third World, the US hoped that Yemen could be nurtured into the wider body politic of independent democratic capitalist states. Yet this plan failed to account firstly for Britain's perceived overlordship of Middle East stability⁹³, and secondly for Washington's inability to reconcile the ingredients of anti-colonialism, anti-communism and long-range economic interest that were inevitably in the mix of a British counter-insurgency campaign.⁹⁴

On occasions, the parallel attempts to pacify the Americans and to keep the covert operations secret made for a strained 'special relationship'. Harold Macmillan admitted that he had a 'prolonged argument with Washington' over the issue of YAR recognition⁹⁵, which the Americans duly granted in December 1962. At a meeting at the White House in October 1963, Douglas-Home lied to President Kennedy when pressed on whether the British were aiding the royalists by stating: 'we were giving them nothing.'⁹⁶ Yet the Prime Minister had not bargained on American intelligence already surmising British involvement in Yemen, hence President Kennedy's leading question. Declassified documents reveal that in the weeks immediately after the revolution in Yemen in 1962, at the time Macmillan was sanctioning mercenary activity in the country, the National Security Council notified the President that Britain 'seems to be

⁹³ Fain, 'Unfortunate Arabia, p.130.

⁹⁴ William Roger Louis, 'American Anti-Colonialism and the Dissolution of the British Empire', *International Affairs*, Vol.61 No.3 (Summer 1985), p.414.

⁹⁵ Macmillan, *At the End of the Day*, p.270.

⁹⁶ TNA, PREM 11/4928, 'Extract from Record of a Conversation between the President of the United States and Lord Home, at the White House, Washington, 4 October 1963.' Significantly, there is no reference at all in Alec Douglas-Homes' memoirs to Yemen.

covertly in the play' in Yemen.⁹⁷ The State Department noted as early as 9 October 1962 that the BMO '*which can hardly be concealed for long*, is likely to lead to a sizeable commitment of UAR (Egyptian) forces in Yemen and conceivably to a Yemeni-UAR invitation to the Soviet Union to increase its participation.'⁹⁸ The fact that the Kennedy administration was almost immediately aware of covert British activity in Yemen not only highlights Washington's refusal to indicate to its closest Cold War ally that its intelligence agencies were acutely aware of UK clandestine military deployments but also makes Prime Minister Douglas-Home's lie to President Kennedy almost a year later all the more incredulous.

However, the assassination of Kennedy, who had taken a personal interest in the Yemen conflict, and the increasing American focus on south-east Asia by the mid-1960s, ensured that British covert operations in South Arabia became dimmer on the Washington radar.⁹⁹ This engendered a policy approaching apathy in the US towards the British counter-insurgency campaign, coming to conceive of the British presence, in Karl Pieragostini's words, 'in the context of the worldwide containment of communism rather than in its more regional roles as the guardian of Western oil supplies and the protector of emerging Commonwealth nations.'¹⁰⁰ Indeed, according to Foreign Secretary Rab Butler, who met with Lyndon Johnson in April 1964, the President

⁹⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1961-63, Vol.18, Near East, 1962-63, Document 68: Memorandum from Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy, 4 October 1962.

⁹⁸ *FRUS*, 1961-63, Vol.18, 'Near East', 1962-63, Document 76: Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to Secretary of State Rusk, 9 October 1962. Emphasis added.

⁹⁹ Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War*, p.85.

¹⁰⁰ Karl Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden and South Arabia: Abandoning Empire* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p.88.

‘seemed to be determined to get us out of our base in Aden,’ although the British had a more sympathetic ally in Secretary of State Dean Rusk.¹⁰¹

However, despite their previously disapproving stance on British involvement in South Arabia, when London announced its east of Suez withdrawal in 1966, the Americans ‘regarded it as a betrayal’ and felt it would leave a political vacuum at the centre of a volatile region susceptible to the appeals of communism.¹⁰² The timetable for departure set out in the Defence White Paper did indeed spark an increase in Soviet activity in the Middle East, multiplying its cohort of military advisors in Egypt and Syria in 1967, although crucially not deploying them to Yemen itself.¹⁰³ Indeed, the American’s considered, although ultimately dismissed, the possibility of launching their own covert operations through Yemeni dissidents to destabilise Nasser and prevent a total Egyptian takeover of South Arabia.¹⁰⁴ British Defence Secretary Denis Healey later revealed his cynicism towards American derision of the British relinquishment of the colonial reins:

¹⁰¹ TNA, DEFE 13/569, ‘Top Secret: From Washington, To Foreign Office, 29 April 1964.’

¹⁰² Louis, ‘The British Withdrawal from the Gulf’, p.84. Indeed, in late 1965 the CIA was confident enough to predict that it was ‘highly unlikely that Britain will decide to abandon the base (Aden) completely.’ *Declassified Document Reference System (DDRS)*, ‘Central Intelligence Agency, Special Memorandum, Subject: Outlook for Aden and the Federation of South Arabia, 5 November 1965’, p.9.

¹⁰³ Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, p.227.

¹⁰⁴ An editorial note in *FRUS*, Vol.10 (Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, 1964-68), p.841 reveals: ‘On July 14, 1967, the 303 Committee, the interdepartmental committee which reviewed and authorized covert operations, discussed a [*text not declassified*] proposal for covert support on a trial basis of paramilitary operations by dissident groups in Yemen with the purpose of increasing Nasser’s difficulties in Yemen and South Arabia... At a meeting with the President on July 18, Rusk stated his opposition to the proposal. Secretary of Defense McNamara expressed his agreement, and the President said it was agreed that nothing would be done.’

‘The United States, after trying for thirty years to get Britain out of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, was now trying desperately to keep us in; during the Vietnam War it did not want to be the only country killing coloured people on their own soil. Moreover, it had at last come to realise that Britain had an experience and understanding in the Third World, which it did not possess itself.’¹⁰⁵

Although perhaps privately perplexed at American anger at the White Paper, the British were keen to harness American help in making the withdrawal as smooth as possible. In a joint US-UK meeting in Washington to discuss the implications of the East of Suez timetable, the Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, requested that the American government might wish to ‘use its influence with Nasser to encourage him to refrain from making difficulties for the British in connection with their withdrawal from Aden.’¹⁰⁶ Even if the plea was made, it fell on deaf ears.

One international aspect that impacted upon the ferocity of the insurgency in South Arabia, particularly in Aden itself, was the perceived high level of British support for Israel during the Six Day War. It was arguably one of the primary contributing factors to the uprising in the Crater district of Aden in June 1967, which lasted fifteen days and

¹⁰⁵ Healey, *The Time of My Life*, pp.280-81.

¹⁰⁶ *FRUS*, 1964-68, Vol.12, Western Europe, Document 255: Memorandum of Conversation, 27 January 1966.

cost the lives of twenty-two British servicemen in the effort to quell the disturbances.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the vested Israeli interest in the outcome of the British counter-insurgency campaign in Yemen led Tel Aviv to covertly offer their assistance to the equally covert BMO. The Israeli Air Force conducted several air drops of supplies and weapons to royalist forces in a clandestine effort to bog Nasser down in a Yemeni quagmire, and also to ensure that a potential royalist victory in the civil war would be rewarded with the recognition of the Israeli state.¹⁰⁸ The conflict in South Arabia not only drew in the regional powers, Egypt and Israel, who staked a claim in the outcome of the conflict, but it also caught the attention of the international diplomatic community like no other British counter-insurgency campaign.

From the moment the British began to re-work the political structure of South Arabia and conduct operations, the United Nations pursued an active and interventionist role in seeking a cessation of British military action and political interference. The UN Committee of 24, the body set up to review decolonisation procedures, published a report in July 1963 condemning Britain's constitutional efforts in forging the FSA.¹⁰⁹ In the wake of Britain's declaration of a state of emergency in South Arabia on 10 December 1963, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 1,972 on 16 December, which called for the British to end their policy of deportation and imprisonment of suspected insurgents.¹¹⁰ Britain denounced the Resolution as one-sided, yet the support

¹⁰⁷ Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, p.155.

¹⁰⁸ Jones, 'Where the State Feared to Tread', pp.729-30.

¹⁰⁹ Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden and South Arabia*, p.52.

¹¹⁰ King-yuh Chang, 'The United Nations and Decolonisation: The Case of Southern Yemen', *International Organisation*, Vol.26 No.1 (1972), p.45.

with which it passed through the Assembly demonstrated the international scrutiny that British actions in Yemen (the overt military operations at least) would be under from the beginning. This scrutiny would increase after the opprobrium wrought on Britain after the civilian deaths at Harib after an RAF bombing raid in March 1964, and would arguably have served as a crucial moment in softening the British government's previously stringent line in shunning any effort by the UN to post observers or peacekeepers across both sides of the YAR-FSA border for fear of losing face on the international stage.¹¹¹ In June 1963 the British acquiesced to the deployment of the UN Yemen Observation Mission (UNYOM). The Mission, which cost \$2million and only ever posted 25 observers on the ground, was wound up in September 1964 citing British obstinacy in aiding the task assigned them and failing to bring the warring parties together to broker a peace deal to end the civil war.¹¹² This unforeseen level of UN intervention in the conduct of a British counter-insurgency campaign reflects firstly the complex web of conflicts unfolding in South Arabia, but secondly remains indicative of the international scepticism with which British military action in an ostensible corner of Empire by the mid-1960s was viewed. The Yemen campaign was to prove to be the 'nadir in the popularity of the British Empire,'¹¹³ and the international community, friends and foes alike, were able to perceive this wane and use it to their own advantage – the Egyptians got a Middle East free from British interference; a sizeable portion of UN member states were placated by the eventual relinquishment of British colonial

¹¹¹ To appreciate the British diplomatic manoeuvrings during the UN Security Council debate in response to the Harib attack see, *TNA*, FO 371/174628. A resolution was eventually passed by 9-0 (with the UK and the US abstaining) in April 1964 that condemned the attack. To get a sense of the internal wrangling within the American cabinet over whether to abstain in the vote see *FRUS*, 'Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson', 9 April 1964 (Document 326), Vol.21 (Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula, 1964-1968), pp.623-24.

¹¹² O'Ballance, *The War in the Yemen*, pp.100-05.

¹¹³ Louis, 'The British Withdrawal from the Gulf', p.84.

control; whilst the Americans were able to extend their sphere of influence and fill the breach left by the British as self-championed guarantor of regional security and oil supplies in the Middle East. We are still living with the results of this final consequence of British withdrawal from commitments east of Suez in 1967 – arguably the first time in the modern era that a counter-insurgency campaign not only triggered a massive overhaul of British defence policy but also engendered geo-strategic upheavals with lasting ramifications for world security.

Reflections on the British Experience in South Arabia and Aden

Sir Richard Turnbull, successor to Sir Kennedy Trevaskis as British High Commissioner to South Arabia, was asked by Defence Secretary Denis Healey what he thought the legacy would be once the sun had set on the British Empire east of Suez. ‘It would leave behind it only two monuments,’ Turnbull quickly replied. ‘One was the game of Association Football, the other was the expression “fuck off.”’¹¹⁴ By November 1967 the British had duly adhered to the sentiment of the second of these testaments. They left their royalist allies and their poor military forces, to eventually succumb to the NLF. A republican victory led to the incarnation of the Marxist state of the Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in November 1970 over the corpse of the FSA.¹¹⁵ The PDRY became a haven for Middle East and European terrorist groups seeking a

¹¹⁴ Healey, *Time of My Life*, p.283.

¹¹⁵ As far back as September 1966 the CIA’s National Intelligence Estimate had predicted that it was ‘unlikely that the Federation will long survive the British withdrawal.’ They were right. *DDRS*, ‘National Intelligence Estimate (30-1-66), 8 September 1966’, p.1.

sanctuary, whilst Aden became a significant port for the Soviet and Chinese fleets who gained a naval foothold in the Gulf region.¹¹⁶ It also became a refuge for insurgents prosecuting an uprising in the neighbouring region of Dhofar against the British-trained forces of the Sultan of Oman.¹¹⁷ In short, the vacuum left by the British in South Arabia was filled by the political and paramilitary forces the British had spent five years covertly and overtly attempting to quash. The counter-insurgency strategy had not been fulfilled. Whereas in Malaya and Kenya a slow burning strategy had eventually prevailed over poorly supplied insurgents, in South Arabia a similarly inert strategy in the counter-insurgency campaign in both rural and urban areas, was not afforded the politically-granted time to gain the upper hand.

The scuttling of Aden had cemented the primacy of politics in the execution of British counter-insurgency strategy. Haunted by the spectre of Suez, British policy-makers had been willing to initiate a programme of covert operations to facilitate a proxy intervention that was out-weighed from the outset by the sheer quantity of Egyptian forces augmenting the Yemeni republicans. In the face of international pressure, and confusing signals from the Americans, the British government crossed the counter-insurgency rubicon in 1966 by committing to a protracted withdrawal in lieu of a satisfactory stemming of insurgent violence.

¹¹⁶ Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, p.296. For evidence of the increased influence the USSR exerted over the PDRY in the early 1970s see Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive II: The KGB and the World* (London: Penguin, 2006), Chapter 11.

¹¹⁷ For an overview of the Dhofar Rebellion see Walter C. Ladwig III, 'Supporting Allies in Counter-Insurgency: Britain and the Dhofar Rebellion', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.19 No.1 (March 2008), pp.62-88.

The campaign in South Arabia proffered some significant lessons for operations in Northern Ireland, where troops were deployed two years after the Aden withdrawal. Some of these lessons were eventually noted and adhered to, with differing effect. The deployment of special forces, particularly in an intelligence gathering capacity, became a cornerstone of military effectiveness in Yemen, and would be utilised again in Ulster. The experience at controlling large crowds and demonstrations would be invaluable on the streets of Belfast and Londonderry, whilst the formalisation of a detention and interrogation system achieved in Aden would have detrimental consequences when replicated in an essentially domestic environment. Other lessons from Yemen were forgotten until the damage was done and the Troubles ingratiated. Foremost was the failure to note the importance of the increasing coverage and attention paid by the media to British counter-insurgency campaigns. To the background of the spiralling Vietnam War, British news crews and journalists filed reports from Yemen with a frequency and intensity not witnessed in any other irregular war involving the British army. This was to represent the beginning of an era in the conduct of irregular war, where the scrutiny and gaze of the modern media made the military answerable to another audience. This would prove to be one of the un-doings of the British campaign in Northern Ireland, and can trace its roots, like many of the tactics unleashed in Ulster, to the barren rocks of Aden.

Chapter 6: *The Failure to Domesticate: Britain, the IRA and the ‘Troubles’, 1969-1979*

At midnight on 31 July 2007 the Union Jack was lowered from the flag pole inside Thiepval Barracks in Lisburn, the headquarters of the British military command. Without fanfare, without ceremony, this event marked the official end to ‘Operation Banner’, the longest operation in British military history. For thirty-eight years the British Army had engaged in a turbulent conflict on the streets and in the countryside of Northern Ireland. What began as a campaign to reduce urban civil disturbance quickly spiralled into a vicious counter-insurgency campaign that polarised communities and normalised violence as the Army and a myriad of sectarian paramilitary groups sought to gain the strategic momentum over what came to be known, in a gross act of understatement, as the ‘Troubles’. Slow lesson learning in the early phases of the conflict would have significant ramifications on the level of violence. Within the first decade of the Troubles some 2,000 lives had been lost¹ – two thirds of the eventual death toll in a conflict to last nearly another twenty years. Belated operational potency on behalf of the British army, achieved in large part by effective intelligence, would keep the fire of this slow burning strategy going.

¹ J. Brian Garrett, ‘Ten Years of British Troops in Northern Ireland’, *International Security*, Vol.4 No.3 (Winter 1979-80), p.87.

The 'Troubles' erupted at a point when the curtain had all but fallen on the British Empire. The retreat east of Suez was underway as the vestiges of imperial rule gave way to decolonised independent states. The experiences of the British Army, intelligence and political communities had become conditioned to fighting insurgencies against distant guerrilla groups in corners of the Empire where the use of force was applied with efficient yet widespread vigour. By the late 1960s the British army in particular had developed what they perceived to be an effective counter-insurgency strategy, founded in Malaya, which had been transferred piecemeal to Kenya, and had been prematurely compromised in Yemen. However, in Northern Ireland the process of lesson transferral was undertaken in the absence of context. Counter-insurgency success in overseas imperial campaigns had ostensibly produced an impression within the British Army that it was an effective strategic and tactical force in irregular warfare scenarios. Yet when a nascent republican insurgency erupted into violence in Northern Ireland in 1969 the Army and their political masters reacted with the detachment and heavy-handedness of a reactionary colonial force, exposing fallacies as to the British army's status as an adaptive 'learning institution' capable of effectively nullifying insurgent opponents.

The British response in part lies in the political fright at the domestic nature of the conflict. A *de facto* civil war was now taking place within the United Kingdom. Political panic found recourse in a military solution. The army was sent in and reacted with a tactical repertoire and a level of force that it had come to know throughout its colonial experiences. In short, there was a failure to domesticate the situation. Some of the most extreme aspects of its previous counter-insurgency experiences were applied, in

particular internment without trial and curfews in communities with suspected sympathies. A combination of Army excessive force and eventual republican paramilitary competency managed to turn around a situation of the British Army being viewed as saviours of the Catholic community in August 1969 to being reviled as the agents of repression, murder and violence. ‘Hearts and minds’ was absent, as a mutual psychology of suspicion arguably permeated relations between the British Army and the Catholic community. For the British Army, in the early phases of the ‘Troubles’, this was just another colonial war, where bombings, assassinations and ambushes, as experienced in the Malayan jungle, the Kenyan mountains and the Yemeni bazaar, were met with raids, arrests, and shootings. This merely helped perpetuate the inevitable ‘action-reaction syndrome’ that fuels insurgencies.

Too often analysed in isolation, British actions in Northern Ireland must be interpreted as part of the lineage of colonial counter-insurgencies, despite the fact that the British had never fought an insurgency where the insurgent opponent could physically take the fight to the British mainland with persistence. As happened in Yemen, political priorities were placed above military imperatives in Northern Ireland also. This can be seen with the highly politicised deployment of troops, the political decision to introduce internment, the numerous attempts (often secret) to find a peace agreement, and the civil-military emphasis upon shifting the security burden to indigenous forces via ‘Ulsterisation’. Coterminous with this remained the ultimate British attempt to transfer

foreign counter-insurgency tactics to an inescapably domestic conflict. The effort to seek and maintain an ‘acceptable level of violence’ by the mid-1970s was indicative of how the security situation was not under British control. This was one of the most regrettable elements to the sorry story of the Ulster ‘Troubles’, that an effective ‘lesson learning’ process, building from experience in previous campaigns, was implemented by the British Army without any contextualisation as to the domestic nature of the conflict as to actually prove to be a catalyst and not a retardant of violence.

This chapter will, however, restrict itself to an analysis of the first decade of the Troubles, from the eruption of violence on the streets of Belfast in 1969 up until the watershed 1979 Warrenpoint and Mountbatten attacks. This period represents the zenith of Britain’s application of an outright civil-military counter-insurgency strategy in the province, providing distinct temporal and analytical bookends. The chapter will also focus almost exclusively upon the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) as the prime instigators of insurgent violence in Northern Ireland given firstly their organisational supremacy over rival republican factions and secondly their focus as the primary target of British Army and security force operations during this period. Although loyalist groups shoulder a distinct portion of responsibility for fuelling violence in Ulster during this period, they played no central part in the British counter-insurgency strategy, and as such do not come under analysis here.

Indeed, the PIRA has also secured a primacy within the existing ‘Troubles’ literature. This fits in to a wider trend that focuses upon the insurgent groups in Northern Ireland and not necessarily upon the insurgent phenomena itself. This plethora of books, however, is distinguished not primarily by their contents but by their authorship. A significant bulk of literature on the PIRA and the wider Troubles has been penned not by academics but by journalists. Not only is this symptomatic of the essentially domestic nature of the conflict coinciding with the dawn of the media age, but also of what M.L.R. Smith has described as the ‘intellectually interned’ nature of the conflict within academic strategic studies circles.² Yet the journalistic influence over the literature has produced some intuitive and indispensable insights into the IRA³, as well as the British military response⁴, and wider socio-political narratives of the Troubles.⁵ Recent academic literature on Northern Ireland has hinged upon the political means by which the Good Friday Agreement represents the teleological culmination of the Troubles.⁶ Yet the band of scholars who have offered a consistent strategic and tactical analysis of the military conduct of Operation Banner and the paramilitary conduct of the IRA has been

² M.L.R. Smith, ‘The Intellectual Internment of a Conflict: The Forgotten War in Northern Ireland’, *International Affairs*, Vol.75 No.1 (1999), p.78.

³ For example see, Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (4th ed) (London: Harper Collins, 1995); Peter Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Fein* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998); Ed Maloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (2nd ed) (London: Penguin, 2007); Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie, *The Provisional IRA* (London: Corgi, 1992).

⁴ For example, see Mark Urban, *Big Boys’ Rules: The SAS and the Secret Struggle Against the IRA* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992); Martin Dillon, *The Dirty War* (London: Arrow, 1991); Peter Taylor, *Brits: The War Against the IRA* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002); Tony Geraghty, *The Irish War: The Military History of a Domestic Conflict* (London: Harper Collins, 2000).

⁵ For example, see David McKitterick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles* (London: Penguin, 2001); Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles* (London: Hutchinson, 1995); Eamonn Mallie and David McKitterick, *The Fight for Peace: The Secret Story Behind the Irish Peace Process* (London: Heinemann, 1996).

⁶ For example see, Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephens (ed), *A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement* (2nd ed) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Paul Dixon, *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Michael Cunningham, *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland, 1969-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

smaller but by no means less influential on our understanding of the dynamics of the Northern Ireland conflict.⁷ This chapter hopes to go some way towards offering a synthesis of this admittedly diminutive segment of Troubles' scholarship and forwarding a framework, via the Tri-Partite model, to help mould an understanding of the way in which the Troubles was conducted in the crucial first ten years, revealing an institutional blindness to the deficiencies and consequences of adopted military practice and the lessons emanating from them, within the context of a consistently malleable strategic endgame.

Background and Origins of the 'Troubles'

Northern Ireland has a turbulent and bloody past. To trace the historical antecedents of the Troubles that flared in 1969 would mire the reader in centuries of conflict, repression and reprisal. The politico-religious catalyst for violence in the province, tracing back to the occupation of Cromwell's army in the seventeenth century, steered a path for Ireland through to the twentieth century as union with Britain gave way to Home Rule, civil war and eventual independence for the 26 southern counties of the Irish Free State in 1921.

⁷ For example see, M.L.R Smith, *Fighting for Ireland: The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement* (London: Routledge, 1995); M.L.R. Smith and Peter R. Neumann, 'Motorman's Long Journey: Changing the Strategic Setting in Northern Ireland', *Contemporary British History*, Vol.19 No.4 (2005), pp.413-435; Peter R. Neumann, 'The Myth of Ulsterisation in British Security Policy in Northern Ireland', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol.26 No.5 (2003), pp.365-377; Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (London: Pan, 2004); Caroline Kennedy-Pipe and Colin McInnes, 'The British Army in Northern Ireland, 1969-1972: From Policing to Counter-Terror', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.20 No.2 (June 1997), pp.1-24

Under the 1920 Government of Northern Ireland Act six counties in the north were retained as part of the United Kingdom and its own governmental structures, centred on Stormont, were created. This catalogue of events in Ulster had been violently fought by the province's citizens politically inclined towards a united Ireland, with a small number finding recourse to violent opposition, from Wolfe Tone's United Irishmen of the eighteenth century, through the Fenians of the nineteenth century, to the Irish Republican Army of the twentieth century. Yet it was the actions of the IRA, their early members blooded in the 1916 Easter Rising, which would come to set a precedent for insurgent opposition against unionist rule in Northern Ireland. Their campaign in the province, and against the British mainland, in the 1930s and 1940s, marked a significant increase in the insurgent nature of the conflict. A 'border campaign' was conducted between 1956 and 1961 as IRA members attacked targets in Ulster before fleeing for refuge in Eire.

The emerging political discourse of civil rights in the 1960s injected a new dimension to the tensions in the Northern Ireland. The civil rights agenda had profoundly altered race relations in the United States and was manifesting itself in Ulster by offering the minority Catholic population a means to express its perceptions of institutionalised prejudice and discrimination in Ulster's predominantly Protestant workforce and their near monopoly over social housing allocations. The left-leaning appeal of the civil rights movement inclined itself towards elements of the republican faction who harnessed the civil rights discourse to reinforce their own proclamations of inherent political injustice in the Northern Irish political structure. As a consequence, the civil rights agenda inter-

twined a wider social movement for change with a justificatory vehicle for renewed IRA violence. Therefore, as Richard English rightly points out, there was not one definable catalyst to propel the rise of the IRA or a single spark to ignite the Troubles. Instead, in the late 1960s there unfolded ‘an interwoven, complex sequence of events, none of which is singly responsible for what followed... (M)ulticausality is more striking than monocausality in these years.’⁸ The civil rights agenda, the social status of Catholics, the built-in unionist control of Ulster’s political institutions, the inflammatory rhetoric of republican and unionist zealots, and the ubiquity of violence in republican history were all ingredients thrown in to the Ulster cauldron that boiled over in August 1969.

‘What a Bloody Awful Country’: The Political Dimension

Home Secretary Reginald Maudling’s apocryphal exasperation as to the state of affairs in Northern Ireland encapsulated the political turmoil that engulfed the province in the 1970s and the frustrations in seeking workable solutions. The first decade of the Troubles was wrought with factionalism, faltered peace efforts, and institutional upheaval. Since the Irish political settlement of 1921 and the creation of Northern Ireland, the devolved government at Stormont had presided over the descent into sectarian conflict in 1969. Within five years, the province would have that devolution revoked with the imposition of Direct Rule from Westminster in March 1972; a brief period of a power-sharing Executive set up in the wake of the Sunningdale Agreement

⁸ English, *Armed Struggle*, pp.146-47.

between January and May 1974; followed by a renewed period of Direct Rule after the Ulster Workers' Council strike brought down the Executive. The contested nature of Northern Ireland's sovereignty, as demonstrated by the brevity of constitutional arrangements, unfolded against the backdrop of spiralling violence and aptly characterised the 'hall of mirrors' that was the Northern Irish political process in the 1970s.⁹ The political strategy for the province was therefore perpetually obfuscated, rendering the military strategy equally mercurial.

In counter-insurgency warfare there is a tangible relationship between the effectiveness of the military campaign and the quality of the political direction it receives. The Troubles in Northern Ireland were to severely test the efficacy of this bond.¹⁰ Scholars of the conflict have been divided as to the political management of the conflict in its first decade under the administrations of Harold Wilson, Edward Heath and James Callaghan. Paul Dixon has argued that the British government's policy towards Northern Ireland since 1972 'has been characterised more by continuity and tactical adjustments than by discontinuity.'¹¹ Even Harold Wilson himself acknowledged that despite the change of British government in 1970 from Labour to Conservative, 'the handling of the Northern Ireland problem was marked by a continuity of policy.'¹² In contrast to this resides the scholarly opinion, as enunciated amongst others by John Newsinger, that the British

⁹ Tony Geraghty, *The Irish War: The Military History of a Domestic Conflict* (London: Harper Collins, 2000), p.xx.

¹⁰ Christopher Tuck, 'Northern Ireland and the British Approach to Counter-Insurgency', *Defence and Security Analysis*, Vol.23 No.2 (2007), p.166.

¹¹ Paul Dixon, 'British Policy Towards Northern Ireland, 1969-2000: Continuity, Tactical Adjustment and Consistent 'Inconsistencies'', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol.3 No.3 (2001), p.342.

¹² Harold Wilson, *Final Term: The Labour Government 1974-1976* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1979), p.67.

were culpable of providing ‘a lack of consistent political direction,’ resulting in a ‘contradictory’ and ‘repressive’ strategy.¹³ However, these opposing perspectives falsely dichotomise the British position. The British were indeed consistent in their inconsistencies. Whilst pursuing security crackdowns, successive governments sought ways of opening dialogue with the terrorist factions. Successive governments sought ways of maintaining a degree of constitutionalism between London and Belfast whilst dictating the province’s agenda. Jeremy Smith’s apt characterisation of the Heath government’s approach to Northern Ireland could easily be extrapolated to encompass the Labour governments of Wilson and Callaghan, in as much as they exuded ‘a dialectic of coercion followed by conciliation.’¹⁴ Even the three secretaries of state for Northern Ireland during this period, William Whitelaw, Merlyn Rees and Roy Mason, all held an over-arching strategic aim of enhancing stability in Ulster via political agreement despite radical deviations in perceptions of how to achieve such an aim – notably Mason’s belief that Direct Rule, and not a devolved institutional arrangement, was the best method by which to prime the conditions for peace and an eventual British military withdrawal.¹⁵ Overall, therefore, the rhetoric was perceivably the same across and even between governments yet the messages were always mixed. Conservative or Labour, the political management of the Northern Irish Troubles in their first decade was decidedly contradictory and at times counter-productive.

¹³ John Newsinger, ‘From Counter-Insurgency to Internal Security: Northern Ireland, 1969-1992’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.6 No.1 (1995), p.93.

¹⁴ Jeremy Smith, ‘“Walking a Real Tight-Rope of Difficulties”: Sir Edward Heath and the Search for Stability in Northern Ireland, June 1970-March 1971’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol.18 No.2 (2007), p.220.

¹⁵ Peter R. Neumann, ‘Winning the ‘War on Terror’? Roy Mason’s Contribution to Counter-Terrorism in Northern Ireland’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.14 No.3 (2003), p.47.

The intricate and drawn-out political process in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1979 was one suffused with obstinacy, fervour and Machiavellian intrigue, oscillating between periods of devolved power and Direct Rule, as spiralling violence and socio-religious tensions provoked the original attempt at, and subsequent failure of, power-sharing as established in the 1974 Sunningdale Agreement. The political efforts to reduce violence and stabilise the security situation during the 1970s were characterised by two primary initiatives. The first was the introduction of internment in 1971, and second was the sporadic engagement in secret negotiations with the IRA from 1972. These two often under-explored elements to the political management of the counter-insurgency campaign in Ulster bring to the fore two particular trends. To begin with, both phenomena were forged in Britain's previous counter-insurgency campaigns abroad, and were here being introduced to a fundamentally domestic conflict. Furthermore, they represent the fluctuation in the British political strategy towards Northern Ireland between promoting hardline security measures (as denoted by internment) and conciliatory overtures to help ensure an end to violence (as symbolised by the engagement in secret talks). Combined, these two seemingly opposite yet concomitantly applied political methods set the tone for political progress in Northern Ireland as the 1970s unfolded.

Internment as a Political Tool

The period of internment in Northern Ireland between 1971 and 1975 represents one of the most turbulent and controversial times in the provinces' troubled history. British attempts to halt spiralling IRA violence by interning suspected republican members and sympathisers, and the treatment they received for the purposes of intelligence-gathering at the hands of the security services, provoked a backlash within the Catholic community and intensified paramilitary and civilian unrest. The four years of internment in Northern Ireland serves to highlight the ill-treatment of detainees by British forces in its historical context, whilst also raising wider questions over the use of torture for interrogation purposes.

The use of internment as a security measure had actually been utilised in Northern Ireland on three previous occasions: between 1931-34, between 1938-45 under the auspices of wartime security, and during the IRA's 1956-61 'border campaign'.¹⁶ Provided for under the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act (1922), the British government reserved the right to intern any person suspected of endangering the peace. Northern Irish Prime Minister Brian Faulkner had been pressing for internment long before its eventual introduction, and in the face of growing IRA activity since the arrival of British troops, British Prime Minister Edward Heath took the proposal of internment to full Cabinet knowing that it contravened the European Convention on Human Rights

¹⁶ Crucially, however, these internment swoops had been carried out on both sides of the Irish border and had proved effective with Garda co-operation. The 1971 internment swoop was undertaken only in Northern Ireland without the prior knowledge of Dublin. This allowed tipped-off IRA members to slip over the border unmolested.

(ECHR). Heath skirted round this issue by insisting that at that moment in time Britain was not a fully-fledged member of the European Community and was therefore not duty-bound by such legislation. The situation in Northern Ireland, Heath argued, ‘was now too grave for us to be swayed by such considerations’¹⁷ – considerations such as human rights, civil liberties and habeas corpus.

The Cabinet Committee on Northern Ireland had already discussed the possibility of internment as early as March 1971, five months before its eventual introduction. Aware of the difficulties posed to the normal legal process by IRA intimidation of witnesses, the government appreciated that internment would offer, in Heath’s words, ‘a chance to bypass the wall of silence by swooping on terrorist suspects without warning.’¹⁸ On 3 August 1971 the Cabinet agreed to grant the authorities in Ulster the power to take any action to rein in violence. The following day Heath authorised the use of internment on the condition that Faulkner ban parades in Northern Ireland for six months in order to diffuse further tensions. However, it would be wrong to interpret the introduction of internment as a unanimous and uncontroversial measure from a British perspective. Despite political acquiescence regarding its implementation there were severe doubts emanating from the security forces. Even the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of

¹⁷ Edward Heath, *The Course of My Life: The Autobiography of Edward Heath* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), p.428.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.428.

Northern Ireland, General Sir Harry Tuzo, 'did not recommend internment on military grounds: he considered it militarily unnecessary.'¹⁹

In the first swoop of 'Operation Demetrius' in the early hours of 9 August, 337 men were taken into custody from an original Special Branch list of 464.²⁰ Faulty RUC intelligence not only failed to distinguish between those who had been involved in republican political campaigns and those who were directly involved in IRA violence, but was also known to have wrongly targeted innocent people with the same name as suspected IRA members, arrested the wrong family member, and indeed arrested IRA veterans whose last involvement with the IRA had been over fifty years ago but whose names still lay on RUC files. Massive civil unrest in the Catholic community followed this first round of arrests. The three days following the introduction of internment witnessed the deaths of twenty-one people as rioting broke out on the streets of Belfast, Londonderry and other towns. In the House of Commons in a two day debate to discuss the implications of internment (which had been introduced during the parliamentary summer recess) Home Secretary Reginald Maudling argued that it was necessary as a measure to contain violence:

'The object of the internment policy is to hold in safety, where they can do no further harm, active members of the IRA and, secondly, to obtain more

¹⁹ The National Archives (hereafter TNA), Kew, London, CJ 4/56, 'Secret Memo from the Northern Ireland Office', 2 August 1971.

²⁰ TNA, CJ 4/56, 'Secret report by the Army Department on Northern Ireland', 10 August 1971.

information about their activities, their conspiracy and their organisation, to help security forces in their job of protecting the public as a whole against their activities.’²¹

This dual justification of internment fails to adequately represent the situation inside the internment camps at Long Kesh, Magilligan, the Crumlin Road prison in Belfast and the temporary internment hold on-board the prison ship *Maidstone*, anchored in Belfast Lough. The internees were not held for reasons of public ‘safety’ as Maudling claimed, given that no senior IRA members were detained and that most internees were released after a short time as the security forces failed to prove that they were involved in terrorist activity. Indeed, of the 800 internees released between 1972 and 1973, just 10 were subsequently charged with other offences.²² Furthermore, arguments that internment was necessary to uphold public safety were misguided given the authorities’ narrow consideration of the impact of internment in a military context but not in a social one. Internment was to prove an instrument of massive upheaval that contributed to a sharp rise in violence. In the eight months of 1971 before the introduction of internment there were 30 deaths relating to sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. In the five months immediately proceeding the first round of arrests 143 people were killed, 46 of which were members of the security forces.²³ Much of this communal unrest was a result of internment’s almost exclusive discrimination against the Catholic community. Of the

²¹ House of Commons Debates, Vol.823 Col.8, 22 September 1971.

²² R.J Spjut, ‘Internment and Detention Without Trial in Northern Ireland 1971-1975: Ministerial Policy and Practice’, *The Modern Law Review*, Vol.49 No.6 (November 1986), p.718.

²³ Anthony Jennings (ed), *Justice Under Fire: The Abuse of Civil Liberties in Northern Ireland* (London: Pluto Press, 1988), p.204.

3,633 terrorist suspects arrested during the whole period of internment just 109 were Protestant Loyalists. Indeed, it took until February 1973 before the first Loyalist was interned, almost eighteen months after its introduction.²⁴ This led to understandable claims that internment was a policy aimed at undermining the wider Catholic community and helped contribute to a hardening of republican sentiment. When pressed on the issue of exclusive Catholic arrest in the House of Commons, Edward Heath denied prejudice on religious or political grounds:

‘The criteria (for internment) are not concerned with whether a person is Catholic or Protestant. What they are concerned with is whether he is a member of an organisation openly engaging in a campaign of violence, and which have openly claimed responsibility for the acts of terrorism which have cost the lives not only of soldiers and policemen, but also of civilians.’²⁵

Yet Heath ignores the detrimental domestic implications of internment and the way in which it unified the minority community around a common repugnance at the policy and the stories of brutality emerging from the released internees provided ample propaganda for the republican cause and hardened anti-British sentiment.²⁶ As Rod Thornton has rightly argued, internment represented a hurried political solution to a conflict that had

²⁴ McKitterick and McKea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p.70.

²⁵ House of Commons Debates, Vol.823 Col.322, 23 September 1971.

²⁶ For revelations and reflections on the period of internment in Northern Ireland see: John McGuffin, *Internment* (Ireland: Anvil, 1973); Ian Brownlie, ‘Interrogation in Depth: The Compton and Parker Reports’, *The Modern Law Review*, Vol. 35 No. 5 (September 1972); and Michael O’Boyle, ‘Torture and Emergency Powers Under the European Convention on Human Rights: Ireland v. the United Kingdom’, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 71 No. 4 (October 1977).

gotten out of hand, and characterised an attempt by the political community in London to reassert its influence over the direction of events.²⁷ The obvious deficiencies of internment soon led Whitehall to seek alternative means by which to diminish violence in Ulster. One element to this altered political approach involved the initiation of secret talks with the IRA itself.

Forging a Secret Peace: Political Negotiations with the IRA

By 1972 negligible headway had been made by the security services in reducing IRA violence. Furthermore, the failure of the mainstream political parties in Northern Ireland to reach an amicable political settlement in the face of the imposition of Direct Rule in March 1972 opened up the option of political dialogue outside the conventional channels. Increasing calls, therefore, for the British to enter into negotiations with the IRA over a ceasefire, became ever more pragmatic and appealing to the British government.²⁸ Secret negotiations, it must be remembered, are a constant trend throughout British counter-insurgency campaigns and had been instigated in previous conflicts in Malaya and Kenya in particular. Northern Ireland was to be no exception.

²⁷ Rod Thornton, 'Getting it Wrong: The Crucial Mistakes in the Early Stages of the British Army's Deployment to Northern Ireland (August 1969 to March 1972)', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.30 No.1 (2007), p.91.

²⁸ 'Talks with IRA proposed by Cooper', *Irish Times*, 31 December 1971 (clipping in TNA, PREM 15/1023)

The first secret talks with the IRA came when opposition leader Harold Wilson, with the permission of Prime Minister Edward Heath, took a meeting with the leadership of the Provisional IRA whilst on a visit to Dublin in March 1972.²⁹ Although nothing came of these talks it marks the establishment of cross-party consensus as to the need to engage in dialogue with the IRA if the peace process was to be moved on politically. Yet perhaps the most meaningful secret contact came with the extraordinary meeting between six PIRA leaders, who were helicoptered in by the RAF, and the Home Secretary William Whitelaw at the Chelsea home of junior minister Paul Channon on 7 July 1972. Although there were many disagreements during this meeting, particularly over the issue of self-determination and the withdrawal of British troops, the two sides did settle on a four point plan that included the mutual suspension of offensive activities for one week, with immediate effect. This bilateral ceasefire, resultant of this significant secret meeting between a senior cabinet minister and the PIRA leadership, eventually lasted just two days as violence flared on the Lenadoon housing estate in Belfast over the rehousing of Catholic families. The perceived heavy-handedness of the British Army in quelling this unrest was taken as an indicator by the IRA that the ceasefire was over.³⁰ Despite the failure to secure a lasting ceasefire from this round of high-level talks, Edward Heath quite astutely defended the decision to engage in talks with the IRA by rightly observing that ‘British government representatives have been meeting terrorists

²⁹ Heath had just months earlier privately described the notion of talking to the IRA as ‘depressing.’ This may in part suggest why he allowed the leader of the opposition, and not a member of the government, to make the first overtures. See *TNA*, PREM 15/1023, ‘From Peter Gregson to S.W Boys-Smith’, 5 January 1972.

³⁰ For the British government’s account of events leading up to the secret talks, a brief description of the conversations between Whitelaw and the IRA leadership, and an evaluation of the events at Lenadoon, see *TNA*, CJ 4/1456, ‘Top Secret: The IRA Truce, 26 June-10 July 1972’.

for years, endeavouring to put an end to terrorism and establish a peaceful regime.’³¹ Whitelaw, although initially opposed to talking to the IRA, became ‘persuaded that a refusal to talk would leave the political initiative in the hands of the IRA.’³² In response to IRA finger-pointing at British military aggression in Lenadoon as justification for breaking the ceasefire, Whitelaw described the secret talks of July 1972 as a ‘non-event’ given the ‘impossible demands’ and ‘absurd ultimatums’ the IRA leaders insisted upon securing. Yet the Home Secretary claimed that by resuming their campaign of violence and by making public their meetings with Whitelaw, the IRA ‘proved they were intransigent and that it was the British Government who really wanted an end to violence.’³³ M.L.R. Smith has attributed this breakdown in peace talks after the secret Whitelaw meeting to ‘customary republican zero-sum thinking, which precluded the possibility of a settlement based on mutual compromise and blinded the movement to the realities of the political and military circumstances.’³⁴ However, blame must also be apportioned to the British government for oscillating between indifference and enthusiasm for secret talks. No coherent pathways out of violence were seriously offered. As such, the Troubles maintained its violent course in the face of such strategic confusion.

Aside from engaging in high-level political talks with the IRA, the British government gave its blessing to the instigation of further talks via backchannel intermediaries. A set of secret talks was initiated by a group of Protestant clergymen in the County Clare town

³¹ Heath, *The Course of My Life*, p.438.

³² William Whitelaw, *The Whitelaw Memoirs* (London: Aurum Press, 1989), p.100.

³³ Ibid, pp.100-1.

³⁴ Smith, *Fighting for Ireland*, pp.107-8.

of Feakle in December 1974, attended by senior IRA leadership and British civil servant Sir Frank Cooper, the Permanent Secretary to the Northern Ireland Office in Stormont. Resultant from this first round of talks was an IRA ceasefire, declared from 22 December 1974 through until 16 January 1975.³⁵ A new set of discussions was initiated after the breaking of the ceasefire, this time involving two Foreign Office officials, James Allan and Michael Oatley (who was in fact MI6's main intelligence officer in Ulster who fulfilled a quasi-diplomatic function to disguise his intelligence role). This new initiative brought about some tangible outcomes, including another IRA ceasefire in February and the establishment of local Incident Centres that would act as monitors of future ceasefires and encourage cross-community involvement. The ceasefire and the Incident Centres lasted until October 1975 when internal feuding within the IRA led to a resumption of violence.³⁶

Michael Oatley himself had received tacit Whitehall support to open up further dialogue with the IRA after the exposure of the Whitelaw talks aroused a public backlash. By 1974 Oatley had developed three secret backchannels to the IRA leadership: one through an English businessman with links to the IRA Army Council member David O'Connell; a second via the former commander of the PIRA's Belfast Brigade; and a third, and most crucial link, through a Londonderry contact with direct access to Sinn Féin President

³⁵ For the full IRA statement declaring a ceasefire as a result of the Feakle talks see *TNA*, CJ 4/864, 'IRA Statement.' For a discussion of the Feakle peace initiative see Coogan, *The IRA*, pp.397-99.

³⁶ Between their creation in February 1975 and early October the same year, Incident Centres dealt with 1,369 complaints ranging from claims of security force or RUC harassment in Catholic areas to violence potentially constituting a breach of the ceasefire by IRA members (*TNA*, CJ 4/867, 'From: Private Secretary to the Secretary of State, 14 October 1975' – this whole file is a useful insight into the British ministerial and civil service discussions of the role of Incident Centres, and includes an example of an incident form that was completed by the personnel who manned the centres.)

Ruairi O'Bradaigh. The collapse of the political arrangements established under Sunningdale had engendered within the 'dovish' element of IRA/Sinn Fein a willingness to at least listen to what the British had to say, believing that, in O'Bradaigh's words, 'every solution was (now) up for consideration.'³⁷

Ultimately, secret dialogue with the IRA/Sinn Fein leadership would eventually establish itself as a hallmark of British political management of the Troubles and arguably paved the way for the Good Friday Agreement to secure its terms and conditions on terrorist violence. Yet what hindered this dialogue in the 1970s was the failure of consecutive governments to fully commit to negotiations. Talking was often a reluctant process for the British political community to engage in and this sent incoherent messages to the insurgent opponent. The sporadic nature of the talks failed to depict a genuine British commitment to finding a non-military solution to the Troubles and also missed the opportunity to therefore further de-legitimise any elongation of the IRA's commitment to violence by forcing them on a path towards constitutional and peaceful political dialogue.³⁸ When combined with the stick of internment, the potential carrot of negotiations was hesitantly and half-heartedly dangled before the IRA. The complex coexistence of these opposing policies failed to significantly quell the disquiet

³⁷ Taylor, *Brits*, pp.169-70.

³⁸ In this sense the former Irish Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald was misguided when he asserted that: 'The contacts had the effect of prolonging the violence by deluding the IRA into believing that a British government would eventually negotiate a settlement with them' (quoted in Mallie and McKitterick, *The Fight for Peace*, p.8). In essence it would be the secret negotiations of the 1990s between the various factions that would pave the way for the Good Friday Agreement. It of course remains a counter-factual notion as to whether a full commitment to secret negotiations at the height of the Troubles in the early 1970s would have engendered a comprehensive peace settlement much earlier than 1998, however the notion that talking to terrorists prolongs their violence is a misconception ignorant of the ubiquity of negotiations in insurgent conflicts.

on the streets of Ulster. With the political management of the conflict failing to bring about lasting change, the nature of the military response would therefore be under additional pressure to suppress violence and restore order. In large part it would fail to meet this challenge during the 1970s.

The Military Dimension

In the Chief of General Staff's (CGS) official review of Operation Banner in July 2006, the then CGS, General Sir Mike Jackson, boldly declared that the campaign was 'one of the very few ever brought to a successful conclusion by the armed forces of a developed nation against an irregular force.'³⁹ This audacious assessment implied that the Good Friday Agreement was possible not because of the cross-community desire for a diplomatic solution and an exhausted resentment towards the prolonged violence, but because the British Army had actually *defeated* the IRA in conventional military terms. However, this assessment belies the significant strategic readjustments the British Army had to undergo during the Troubles and fails to account for the war of attrition the military engaged the IRA in after initial hopes of quickly stamping out the insurgent threat diminished as an 'acceptable level of violence' became the strategic norm. Furthermore, Jackson fails to acknowledge the exceedingly detrimental effects certain military operations and tactics had upon the level of violence in Northern Ireland as perceived heavy-handedness fanned the flames of wider social conflict, especially in the

³⁹ 'Operation Banner: An Analysis of Military Operations in Northern Ireland'. Report prepared under the direction of the Chief of General Staff, Army Code 71842 (Ministry of Defence, July 2006).

early 1970s. With entire neighbourhoods existing under the wary eye of a watchtower or armoured vehicle, the Army's routine patrol and monitoring tasks were frequently overtaken by riot control and incursion operations into republican strongholds. As Bloody Sunday and Operation Motorman demonstrated, the Army's conduct during riots and incursions had considerable and often opposing repercussions for the broader British strategy.

Anti-IRA Operations and Riot Control in the early Troubles

The early years of the Troubles posed some distinct difficulties that impinged upon the British Army's actions. The Army was deployed in 1969 against a backdrop of civil unrest before a significant insurgent threat had emerged, therefore requiring the military to fulfil a fundamental policing function – a task that although not wholly contradictory to their training, ran against the grain in relation to issues such as use of force. Further to this, as mentioned above, the Army was hamstrung by a dispersion of political authorities in Belfast and London and faced inconsistent political management, thus preventing the cementing of a cogent military strategy. Indeed, this strategy was further confused by a shift in *modus operandi* from policing to counter-insurgency as the IRA emerged as a potent security threat in the early 1970s. The problems adapting to all these changes posed distinct difficulties for the British Army and led the military to make some gratuitous errors in their efforts to quell social unrest and quash the insurgent threat posed by the IRA.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Kennedy-Pipe and McInnes, 'The British Army in Northern Ireland, 1969-1972', p.13.

The critical mistake made by the British Army and the RUC in early riot control scenarios is that it allowed itself to be provoked into over-reaction by the goading provocations of a violent fringe movement. Heavy-handed riot control techniques utilised by the RUC at the start of the Troubles stood in contrast to the default tactics employed by the Metropolitan Police and other mainland UK constabularies at the time, who would use ‘cordons and wedges in close physical contact with demonstrators to prevent disorder. There would be no batons or gas.’⁴¹ The broader unrest within the wider Catholic community was heightened by the swift degeneration of relations with the British Army as the military mishandled crowd control during the first marching season of 1970 by using CS gas in the Catholic areas of the Ballymurphy estate in Belfast during disturbances.⁴² The civil-military response to increasing public unrest in 1970 compounded the incendiary situation. The Heath government decided to devolve security decision-making powers to the Army, granting commanders on the ground a freer hand in responding to events in a manner they saw fit. This enabled the then General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Northern Ireland, General Ian Freeland, to manifest his personal hardline style of counter-insurgency on the streets of Ulster, unshackled from previous political restraints. Freeland imposed a curfew in response to rioting in the Lower Falls area of west Belfast on 3 July 1970 without political permission – an unprecedented move considering it was applied on British soil, tantamount to martial law. Freeland’s predilection for cordon-and-search operations was

⁴¹ Chris Ryder, *The RUC, 1922-1997: A Force Under Fire* (Revised edition) (London: Mandarin, 1997), p.138.

⁴² Thornton, ‘Getting it Wrong’, p.83.

rolled out across the entire estate in a domineering act of indiscriminate crowd control. The curfew prompted a severe breakdown in trust between the Army and the Catholic community in the Lower Falls and beyond as reaction to the move prompted a severe backlash.⁴³ Freeland's implementation of collective punishment upon the Lower Falls community is demonstrable of an out-of-touch quasi-colonial approach that was inappropriately transferred into a domestic conflict. This rudimentary and insensitive lesson transferral in large part explains the severe deterioration of the security situation and the deep-seated resentment that resided within the Catholic community towards the British Army.

However, the tragic apogee of heavy-handed British Army crowd control came in Londonderry on Sunday 13 January 1972. A civil rights demonstration had been proscribed by the authorities yet took place regardless against a backdrop of increasing Catholic unrest at social conditions and anger at the British Army's seeming inability to distinguish IRA members from the wider community from which they were drawn. The chronology of events that unfolded on that Sunday afternoon are highly contested and have been the subject of two judicial reviews, one of which is still on-going.⁴⁴ Regardless of whether IRA snipers fired the first bullet or not, the resulting assault by British troops upon the assembled crowd left thirteen unarmed demonstrators dead. Bloody Sunday was to mark the dark nadir of British conduct in the Troubles and

⁴³ Ibid, pp.85-87.

⁴⁴ The Widgery Tribunal was set up in the immediate aftermath of the shootings and largely exonerated the actions of the British Army in April 1972. The Saville Inquiry was established in 1998 under pressure from the families of the deceased to review the events of the day. Lord Saville's long-awaited findings are due in late 2009.

catastrophically showcased the British Army's recourse to firepower in crowd control scenarios in the context of an already confusing urban terrain. It marked a seemingly unredeemable breakdown in trust between the people and the Army, therefore breaching an essential tenet of counter-insurgency warfare regarding the fundamental requirement of building good relations with domestic populations and positing the military as the indispensable guardian of public security in the face of an insurgent threat. The security situation in Northern Ireland would drastically degenerate in the wake of Bloody Sunday and would inordinately complicate the military's task of fulfilling the strategic aim of restoring order to Ulster and eliminating the insurgent threat that thrived on such disorder.

The biggest test of British Army determination and capability in the immediate aftermath of Bloody Sunday came in the summer of 1972 as barricades were erected demarcating IRA-controlled zones in Londonderry and Belfast – self-styled 'no go' areas for the security forces. This bold show of force by the IRA severely challenged British Army resolve to tackle insurgent tenacity in the face of simmering social tension and spiralling violence. On 21 July 1972 the IRA had ended its ceasefire by unleashing a wave of twenty-one bomb attacks across Belfast, killing nine people, in what came to be known as Bloody Friday. It became a high strategic priority to end these 'no go' areas and send a statement to the IRA that the British still maintained the strategic upper-hand in the conflict, especially since the imposition of Direct Rule in March 1972. Operation Motorman was to be the conduit through which the British would send that message. Launched on 31 July 1972, Operation Motorman was undertaken by thirty-eight Army

battalions, totally 22,000 troops, and a further 5,300 Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) soldiers – the largest deployment of British troops in the province in all of its twentieth century turbulence.⁴⁵ In the end, the IRA's organisational capabilities and manpower levels were utterly insufficient to repel the overwhelming display of force shown by the British Army. As one soldier deployed to Londonderry for Motorman, Lt-Colonel R.P. Mason of the Royal Scots, put it: 'After all the hype and the prep and the nerves, the whole thing was much of a non-event; the day went quieter than expected and though the mobs were out in force with bricks and bottles... we had no serious casualties.'⁴⁶ The swift eradication of the 'no-go' areas without overt violent opposition, in M.L.R. Smith and Peter Neumann's words, 'permanently altered the strategic setting in Northern Ireland.'⁴⁷ Such an interpretation rightly places the operation at the apex of a distinct downturn in the level of violence in the province – July 1972 marked a bloody high point in violence with ninety-five deaths in that month alone. After Motorman the number of fatalities related to the Troubles declined and never again reached the heights of 1972. Motorman had removed the IRA's strongholds and significantly undermined the group's bargaining capacity, retarded their operational capabilities, and diminished the psychological edge they arguably felt they had over the security forces. With Operation Motorman, therefore, what is presented is the first real British Army operation executed with overwhelming yet reasonable force, and the results were tangible. Although turning a corner in the conflict there still remained a persistent underlying resentment towards the British Army within the wider community, and it certainly did

⁴⁵ Smith and Neumann, 'Motorman's Long Journey', p.414.

⁴⁶ Lt.Col. Mason's testament appears in Ken Wharton's oral history account of British soldiers who served in Northern Ireland, *A Long, Long War: Voices from the British Army in Northern Ireland, 1969-1998* (Solihull: Helion, 2008), pp.120-21.

⁴⁷ Smith and Neumann, 'Motorman's Long Journey', p.414.

not halt IRA activities. The introduction of the SAS into Northern Ireland was designed to help achieve those wider strategic aims. In fact, it had the opposite effect.

Daring to Win: The SAS and 'Shoot to Kill'

The SAS has shouldered much of the blame for many murders, kidnappings and beatings in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. The regiment has been a lightning rod for criticism and condemnation from the republican and wider Catholic community. SAS squadrons had been active in Ulster in 1969 and in 1974, but this was done secretly and on a temporary basis, driven by operational and not strategic needs.⁴⁸ Yet by early 1976 Prime Minister Harold Wilson felt compelled to take action to halt the proliferation of rural violence in South Armagh, so-called 'Bandit Country'. On 7 January, Wilson publicly announced the deployment of the SAS to South Armagh for patrolling and surveillance tasks in an ostentatious political move designed as much to strike fear into the IRA as to shore-up the impression of Wilson's grip on the conflict. The heralded introduction of the SAS has been widely criticised by scholars and practitioners alike. In his memoirs, General Sir Peter de la Billiere, Director of the SAS from 1978 to 1982, accused Wilson of deploying the regiment in a 'deliberate blaze of publicity' that made it more vulnerable to IRA 'black propaganda' surrounding its activities, thus undermining its entire counter-insurgency effort.⁴⁹ Tony Geraghty has argued that 'if Wilson's response in 1969 was under-played, this looked like a serious over-reaction.'⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Urban, *Big Boys' Rules*, p.4.

⁴⁹ Peter de la Billiere, *Looking for Trouble: SAS to Gulf Command – the Autobiography* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p.315.

⁵⁰ Geraghty, *The Irish War*, p.118.

Despite the controversy, just eleven SAS members were deployed in January 1976, rising to a full squadron of sixty by April.⁵¹

Surrounded by myth, and hampered by a blurred chain of command between local, divisional and national commanding officers, the value of the SAS to the British military strategy lay in prosecuting a covert war against the IRA. However, the regiment was stalked by controversy. One source of contention surrounded the SAS's alleged cross-border activities in the Republic of Ireland. Claims that several IRA subjects were 'lifted' from their homes just inside Ireland and then arrested once brought back into Northern Ireland raised questions as to the legal (not to mention political) ramifications of the regiment's operational remit.⁵² Yet the most significant controversy surrounds claims of the adoption of a deliberate 'shoot to kill' policy by the SAS. By the end of 1978, after a full three years of deployment, the SAS was responsible for the deaths of ten people, three of whom were innocent members of the public mistaken for IRA members.⁵³ These tragedies were a public relations disaster for the British Army, jeopardising not only community relations but undermining the future of covert operations by elements of the security forces and intelligence agencies. A *Sunday Times* investigation into the 'shoot to kill' policy concluded that 'there is no doubt that when the SAS or the security forces catch IRA men in the act and open fire, they shoot to kill,' however this argument only applied to IRA members 'caught in the act of planting a

⁵¹ James Adams, Robin Morgan and Anthony Bambridge, *Ambush: The War Between the SAS and the IRA* (London: Pan, 1988), p.54.

⁵² Urban, *Big Boys' Rules*, pp.9-10.

⁵³ Anthony Kemp, *The SAS: Savage Wars of Peace, 1947 to the Present* (London: Penguin, 2001), p.129.

bomb, or aiming a weapon,’ and was not a blanket policy.⁵⁴ Deploying the elite regiment of the British Army had become a sharp double-edged sword for the government. The attention and criticism the SAS encountered as a result of its high profile mistakes and myth-making aura provoked the Callaghan government to shift the SAS’s efforts away from offensive ambush towards observation and intelligence-gathering in 1978. This of course did not mark an end to the controversial deployment of the SAS in the Troubles, yet it marked a watershed in the British military attempt to wrestle the strategic initiative from the IRA by instigating a covert war. It did, however, raise further questions about the use of force by the British Army as a whole during the early phases of the Troubles.

The Use of Force

The use of force in Northern Ireland by British troops was codified on a ‘Yellow Card’ issued to each soldier. The card listed the rules of engagement (RoE) with suspected IRA members and enshrined the notion that opening fire was a last resort. Yet incidents involving the accidental shooting of unarmed civilians (as brutally witnessed on Bloody Sunday) and especially the high profile mistakes made by the SAS, severely undermined the belief that the British Army was adhering to its own Yellow Card principles. Nevertheless, the Army was anxious to absolve itself of culpability by pointing out the high pressure, split second decision-making that its soldiers were required to make in kinetic engagements with insurgents and wrapped itself in the centuries-old moral risk of warfare – either kill or be killed. But in retrospect, the Army was willing to concede, as

⁵⁴ Adams et al, *Ambush*, p.33.

the Chief of General Staff's end of Operation Banner report states, that on occasion the Army failed to 'discriminate between those perpetrating the violence and the remainder of the community.'⁵⁵

The Army did, however, make moves to try and prepare soldiers as best as they could for the particular combat environment awaiting them upon deployment to Northern Ireland. The particular exigencies of urban counter-insurgency had been a residual element of the British irregular warfare experience (especially the recent debacle in Aden), yet it was not until the mid-1970s that there came a belated acknowledgement that the Army needed specific training to adapt it to the essentially domestic nature of the campaign. The Army thus established Northern Ireland Training Advisory Teams (NITAT) in bases on the UK mainland as well as in Germany to verse soldiers on the verge of deployment to Ulster in counter-insurgency principles, urban infantry skills, riot control methods, and instruction as to the RoE laid out on the Yellow Card.⁵⁶ Such training can be perceived as vital given that by 1977 the British Army had fourteen battalions in Ulster, each with their own Tactical Areas of Responsibility (TAORs). In the same year, these battalions were digesting the publication of the new Army manual 'Land Operations Volume III: Counter Revolutionary Operations', which became, in Mark Urban's words, 'the bible for Army operations in Ulster' after its release.⁵⁷ The manual represented an effort to bring together the Army's collective counter-insurgency

⁵⁵ Ministry of Defence, 'Operation Banner', paragraph 216.

⁵⁶ David Pearson, 'Low Intensity Operations in Northern Ireland', in Michael C. Desch (ed) 'Soldiers in Cities: Military Operations on Urban Terrain' (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute report, October 2001), pp.116-17.

⁵⁷ Urban, *Big Boys' Rules*, p.19.

thinking and bring a practical amount of doctrine to proceedings in the province. Yet even the introduction of doctrine extolling the virtue of minimum force in Northern Ireland could not prevent occasional incidents and controversies from causing social ructions within Ulster as claims of a deliberate ‘shoot to kill’ policy became so rife as to blur the line between propaganda and reality and undermined any moral exclusivity the British sought to hold over the conflict. Indeed, in 1970/71, the GOC General Sir Ian Freeland issued orders permitting the targeting and shooting of petrol bombers in riot situations.⁵⁸ As one Rifleman with the Royal Green Jackets attested: ‘Of course we shot to kill; we aimed at the biggest target, the geezer’s chest just as we had been trained to do... (T)his ain’t Hollywood, it’s not a film, and it’s us or them.’⁵⁹ Such debates surrounding the use of force altered with the wider shift in the military sands as a process towards ‘Ulsterisation’ began to occur in the late 1970s.

Ulsterisation

One of the most successful strands of previous British counter-insurgency strategy was the utilisation of domestic security forces. An integral element of an eventual exit strategy was to sufficiently train indigenous police and military who would step up their patrolling and operational commitments as the British stepped down. Such initiatives were implemented in Malaya, Kenya and South Arabia. Furthermore, domesticating the responsibility for community security in such a way helped ‘normalise’ societies vulnerable to insurgent attack. The belated realisation of the need to domesticate the

⁵⁸ This is confirmed by testaments in Wharton, *A Long, Long War*, p.69. Also see Ryder, *The RUC*, p.121.

⁵⁹ Anonymous Rifleman testament in Wharton, *A Long, Long War*, p.122.

conflict in Northern Ireland did not come until the 1976 process of 'Ulsterisation' when the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) were granted a much bigger role in policing and security operations.

In 1975 the Wilson government sought ways to scale down the security commitment to Ulster as the financial cost of Operation Banner was set against an increased resentment at the continuing presence of British Army patrols. It published a policy document entitled 'The Way Ahead' in which the security set up in Northern Ireland was to be re-worked in order to ascertain 'police primacy'. Throughout 1976 operational control flowed from the Army to the RUC, intending to send a powerful message to the Catholic population in particular that their security was not provided by an army of occupation but by their fellow Ulstermen. RUC Chief Constable Kenneth Newman saw Ulsterisation as an opportunity to rejuvenate his force and rein in the security situation: 'The RUC would be hard but sensitive... Maintaining law and order simply means giving people the freedom to conduct their own lives.'⁶⁰ Yet this was undermined by two major factors. Firstly, the RUC had an almost exclusive Protestant make up, giving the impression to the Catholic community that they were loyalist paramilitaries in uniform. Secondly, any advantage that Ulsterisation could have reaped in terms of placating the non-unionist population was diminished by allegations of a 'shoot-to-kill' policy amongst the residual elements of the British Army. Peter Neumann has pointed to what he perceives to be the 'myth' of Ulsterisation, arguing that numbers of Ulster security force members peaked before not after 1976, and that a more adequate description of the

⁶⁰ Quoted in Ryder, *The RUC*, p.142.

process would be ‘professionalisation’ given the shift towards indigenous policing as opposed to external military control.⁶¹ Neumann’s analysis helpfully delineates the quantitative and qualitative elements of Ulsterisation, yet it is evident that Ulsterisation’s most potent effect was as a symbol of reduced British Army control over security in Northern Ireland and not as a numerical exercise in rotating military for police.

The Army may, after 1976, have resorted to acting in a support role in light of newly established RUC operational command, yet the two organisations had a poorly defined working relationship. Command and control (C2) structures were often obfuscated, whilst intelligence-sharing became a reluctantly rare occurrence.⁶² This was despite the creation of a devolved organisational structure aimed at co-ordinating the military-security effort. At the top of this system was the Province Executive Committee (PEC), which moulded the strategic and operational direction of Operation Banner on an *ad hoc* basis (a task of heightened importance given Northern Ireland’s unique position in the history of modern British counter-insurgency as being the only campaign conducted without the creation or implementation of a comprehensive campaign plan⁶³). The PEC was chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable of the RUC as a demonstration of police primacy, and was attended by the Commander of Land Forces. Devolution of such decision-making occurred through the establishment of local Division Action Committees (DACs) who pre-empted and reacted to events within their TAOR based on

⁶¹ Peter R. Neumann, ‘The Myth of Ulsterisation in British Security Policy in Northern Ireland’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol.26 No.5 (2003), p366/368.

⁶² Ryder, *The RUC*, p.157.

⁶³ Ministry of Defence, ‘Operation Banner’, paragraph 408.

intelligence leads.⁶⁴ Indeed, it would be such intelligence leads that would provide the most powerful weapon for the security forces in the secret war against the IRA and eventually add an element of targeted purpose to the British strategy.

‘Big Boys’ Rules’: The Intelligence Dimension

Northern Ireland was an intelligence war. For the British military and intelligence agencies, the collection, dissemination and use of intelligence material became ubiquitous in operational terms during the 1970s. By the end of the decade one regular soldier in every eight was directly involved in intelligence work in Ulster.⁶⁵ A myriad of security branches were involved in intelligence gathering, often leading to confused structures and conflicting agencies. The Army, the RUC, MI5 and MI6 all vied for intelligence supremacy leading to the establishment of various intelligence operations and units that contributed highly valuable sub-parts to an admittedly uncoordinated whole. As a consequence, the intelligence war in Northern Ireland was essentially effective but controversial and mismanaged. By the end of the first decade of the Troubles, British intelligence had identified the IRA leadership, penetrated its ranks and to a large extent help retard IRA violence. Yet this was undermined in the early phases of the campaign by a lack of operational intelligence on the IRA and the absence of a centralised structure to manage intelligence gathering – arguably a perennial pattern in the early phases of previous British counter-insurgency campaigns. As a result of this

⁶⁴ Pearson, ‘Low Intensity Operations in Northern Ireland’, p.110.

⁶⁵ Ministry of Defence, ‘Operation Banner’, paragraph 503.

intelligence malaise, each separate intelligence unit set about collecting their own information without pooling it. In the early 1970s it was the UK intelligence agencies that had pre-eminence over their military and police colleagues.

Despite a residual MI5 presence in Northern Ireland in the early Troubles, in 1971 Prime Minister Edward Heath authorised MI6 operations in Northern Ireland, placing reliance upon perceived SIS efficiency at running agent and informer networks, despite MI6s initial concerns that in an essentially domestic setting Ulster was the preserve of MI5.⁶⁶ MI6 primacy lasted just two years when MI5 was charged with taking the intelligence lead in an atmosphere of distrust between the two agencies. By the end of the 1970s MI6 retained a token presence in Belfast, as MI5 took over the running of MI6s informers. Once they gained intelligence primacy, MI5 concentrated almost exclusively on strategic intelligence, directing its efforts towards undermining the IRAs long term plans.⁶⁷ Tactical and operational intelligence was largely the preserve of the Army and the RUC.

The RUCs intelligence capabilities stemmed from two main branches. C Department housed the Criminal Investigations Department (CID), responsible for investigation of terrorist incidents and interrogating suspects. E Department was the Special Branch, who ran their own network of IRA informers.⁶⁸ In 1976 the RUC created three Regional Crime and Intelligence Units to unite the efforts of CID and Special Branch and improve

⁶⁶ Stephen Dorril, *MI6: Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty's Secret Service* (New York: Free Press, 2000), p.738.

⁶⁷ Margaret Gilmore, 'MI5 in Northern Ireland', *RUSI Monitor* (March 2008), p.6.

⁶⁸ Urban, *Big Boys' Rules*, p.20.

co-ordination.⁶⁹ The Army ran parallel informer networks, exacerbating the myriad intelligence avenues and competition that already existed within the RUC and the intelligence services. Special Military Intelligence Unit (Northern Ireland) – SMIU NI – was established by the Army in 1972 to act as a bridge between the Army and RUC Special Branch to aid intelligence sharing, which to a limited degree it achieved.⁷⁰ Further efforts at closer Army-RUC intelligence co-operation were augmented in 1978 by the creation of integrated intelligence centres known as the Tasking and Co-ordination group (TCG). Comprised of CID, Special Branch and Army officers, the two TCGs (one in the north and one in the south of Ulster) aimed at pooling intelligence material and making operational use out of it, therefore reducing intelligence confusion, duplication or contradiction. Mark Urban has described the establishment of the TCGs as ‘probably the most important of all steps taken during the late 1970s towards enhancing intelligence gathering.’⁷¹

By 1975 the Army had at its disposal around 100 soldiers dedicated solely to covert intelligence gathering. By the end of the decade this number was up to 300.⁷² This reflected a conscious shift in the Army’s intelligence focus in the late 1970s, away from regular ‘Green Army’ sources, to covert small specialist intelligence units, especially the SAS, who by this point had honed its own surveillance capabilities and become an efficient intelligence gathering unit in its own right. Yet perhaps the most innovative, although concertedly controversial, plank of the British intelligence war in Northern

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.29.

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp.20-21.

⁷¹ Ibid, p.94.

⁷² Ibid, p.11.

Ireland stemmed from the creation in 1970 of the covert Mobile Reconnaissance Force (MRF) by Brigadier (later General Sir) Frank Kitson, commander of the 39 Brigade in Belfast. The MRF was designed to enhance the Army's early intelligence capabilities at the dawn of the Troubles, independent from the RUC and MI5. The MRF mounted plain-clothes covert surveillance operations predominantly in Catholic areas, often in conjunction with IRA members turned informers (colloquially known as the 'Freds'). One of its most notorious operations was the 1972 'Four Square Laundry' sting in which locally recruited MRF members established a door-to-door laundry business in the estates home to suspected IRA members. Clothes unwittingly handed over to the laundry van were then driven away for forensic analysis in search of tell-tale gun-shot residue or traces of explosive materials. This operation was exposed, however, when an MRF officer revealed the nature of the forces' operations when charged in court with attempted murder. The MRF was subsequently wound up in 1973 but was succeeded by a more sophisticated surveillance unit, 14 Intelligence Company. Split into three Detachments (Dets) covering the areas of Belfast (East Det), Armagh (South Det) and Londonderry (North Det)⁷³, 14 Intelligence Company mounted surveillance operations primarily from static observation posts (OPs) or from unmarked cars (so-called 'Q cars') fitted with radio equipment. 14 Intelligence Company proved less controversial than its predecessor, largely due to its down-played emphasis on invasive sting operations that utilised turned insurgents. Mark Urban has argued that the use of 'Freds' (or 'Belfast counter-gangs' as he labels them) was 'foolish' given the republican community's 'ability to win back the loyalty of IRA men who had changed sides.'⁷⁴ Urban, however,

⁷³ Taylor, *Brits*, p.3.

⁷⁴ Urban, *Big Boys' Rules*, p.37.

underplays three significant factors. Firstly, the punishment for ‘touts’ or informers within republican circles was brutal, and often fatal. Known informers were rarely given a second chance. Secondly, as Kevin Toolis has pointed out, the republican community was extraordinarily tight-knit, to such an extent that: ‘There is no place for outsiders (i.e. MI5 or Special Branch spies) to be slotted into this complex web of social and extended family relationships. Informers must come from within; they must be turned.’⁷⁵ Finally, Urban fails to place the utility of indigenous covert units in its historical lineage of recent British counter-insurgency campaigns. Formed in both Malaya and Kenya beforehand, the use of captured or ‘turned’ units of insurgents played a significant role in the intelligence wars to undermine the insurgent opposition. Indeed, Frank Kitson’s replication of his ‘pseudo-gang’ methods from its pioneering crucible of Kenya to the streets of Northern Ireland, emphasises modes of lesson-learning and transferral in a counter-insurgency context. Lesson-learning in this respect rested upon the transfer of personnel between campaigns (a crucial point especially given the way in which Kitson himself was personally vilified by the republican community for his influence on British tactics) and on harnessing the (misguided) belief that a successful tactic in one campaign is readily available for replication elsewhere, without contextualising the nature of each campaign.

Despite the controversy surrounding the MRF, other covert surveillance units proliferated throughout the Army and police in the late 1970s. Aside from 14 Intelligence Company and the SAS, the Army established Close Observation Patrols

⁷⁵ Kevin Toolis, *Rebel Hearts: Journeys Within the IRA’s Soul* (London: Picador, 1996), p.195.

(COPs), consisting of small numbers of trained soldiers who would build up an intelligence picture from routine patrolling. The RUC, keen to protect their intelligence domain, created an observation unit known as Bronze Section in 1976 as part of their Special Patrol Group (SPG), in order to provide undercover surveillance. This became overshadowed by Special Branch's creation of an elite observation unit, E4A, in 1977 as part of its Operations Division (E4), to undertake mobile and static operations. Yet despite such an abundance of overlapping surveillance units, there were few joint operations and there was little co-ordination.⁷⁶

Indeed, the co-ordination of British intelligence in Northern Ireland and assessment of its direction are issues that have received relatively little attention. As Eunan O'Halpin has pointed out, the focus on operational intelligence has come at the price of sidelining the role of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC).⁷⁷ Although primarily focussed upon the Cold War threat of the Soviet Union at the time the Troubles broke out, the JIC became 'heavily involved' with Northern Ireland by 1970.⁷⁸ Although redactions in the National Archives make it difficult to assess the evolution of JIC discussions on Ulster, the prevalence of JIC involvement in the co-ordination of the UK intelligence machine in Ulster paints a picture of an intelligence campaign devoid of local, tactical pre-eminence and controlled by top-down dictation as to the focus of the intelligence effort.⁷⁹ Such centralised co-ordination of intelligence efforts were intensified after the

⁷⁶ Ibid, pp.45-48.

⁷⁷ Eunan O'Halpin, "'A Poor Thing But Our Own': The Joint Intelligence Committee and Ireland, 1965-72", *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.23 No.5 (October 2008), p.661.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.661.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.673.

same day assassination of Earl Mountbatten off the shore of Mullaghmore and the ambush and killing of twelve paratroopers at Warrenpoint on 27 August 1979. Maurice Oldfield, the former head of MI6, was appointed as the Security Co-ordinator in Northern Ireland to harmonise the actions of the increasingly fractious Army and RUC by providing a clear line of management for the entire intelligence effort. It was not Oldfield's role to conceive of or execute intelligence operations but instead to keep Whitehall informed as to the nature of intelligence efforts in Ulster and ensure greater inter-agency co-operation in the face of a seemingly resurgent IRA. Indeed, a large part of Oldfield's work was an effort to regain the intelligence initiative and reverse the level of IRA recruitment.

Yet despite the controversial nature of the role intelligence played in the internment fiasco and in facilitating the use of the SAS, it remains a fair judgement, as Bradley Bamford has argued, that 'British intelligence was ultimately very effective in the Northern Ireland conflict, but at the price of employing some highly dubious methods.'⁸⁰ The contentious and ubiquitous employment of covert intelligence operations was seized upon by IRA propagandists and helped contribute to narratives built upon depictions of nefarious British duplicity. Yet such operations proved essential to producing tangible security results, such as the infiltration of an IRA unit, the detention of a wanted terrorist, or the thwarting of bomb attacks. Despite the discredited reputation of the Army and RUC in the eyes of the Catholic community and the subsequent hindrance this

⁸⁰ Bradley W.C Bamford, 'The Role and Effectiveness of Intelligence in Northern Ireland', *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol.20 No.4 (2005), p.581.

created in building a reliable intelligence picture of day-to-day activity in republican strongholds, the 'wall of silence' the intelligence operatives found in these communities was transcended by the cultivation of effective surveillance mechanisms, widespread (if not overtly discriminate) interrogation of suspects, and by the nurturing of a network of agents and informers. As the Troubles evolved, the importance of the most comprehensive intelligence effort in any British counter-insurgency campaign became integral to the overall outcome of Operation Banner. It demonstrated not only the importance of gathering tactical intelligence, but also highlighted the utility of specialised intelligence units and the necessity of parallel human and signals intelligence capabilities in a counter-insurgency context.⁸¹ Eventually, the inter-agency approach to waging the intelligence war on the IRA came to undermine, but not eradicate, the IRA's strategic competence and weaken its organisational functioning.

IRA Organisation

The IRA could only react to and not necessarily shape the events of summer 1969 given the ubiquitous influence of wider social upheaval. Indeed, the outbreak of the Troubles, far from providing a unifying moment around which the IRA could mobilise its organisation on a wave of popular support, actually proved to be a moment of undoing for the IRA. The group was unprepared for the launch of a mass campaign of violence against British rule in Northern Ireland. However, it soon became clear to the IRA

⁸¹ For discussion of these issues see Brian A. Jackson, 'Counter-Insurgency Intelligence in a 'Long War': The British Experience in Northern Ireland', *Military Review* (Jan-Feb 2007), pp.74-85.

General Headquarters (GHQ) that ‘events had largely passed the point of no return,’ specifically that ‘there could no longer be any hedging on the issue of abstentionism’ from the political process.⁸²

In December 1969 the Army Convention (the highest authority within the IRA) met in Dublin and, with the aim of presenting a united republican front, recognised the governments in both the north and south of Ireland, as well as that in Westminster in an effort to steer the course of events in their favour from within and not outside the existing status quo. This proved a highly contentious move within the wider republican movement. Factions opposed to the abandonment of abstentionism (on the grounds that it would tacitly legitimate the British rule in Ulster) formed a breakaway Provisional Army Council which rejected overtures to opponents of a united Ireland. This faction soon developed its own paramilitary wing, the Provisional IRA (PIRA), which went about recruiting members north and south of the border who were disgruntled with the seeming concessions to the British. This split within the Republican movement was sealed in January 1970 at the Sinn Féin conference when the Provisional’s formalised their secession, taking with them the more traditional, less ideological members who were primarily concerned with issues of nationalism than with socialism.⁸³ Those members that remained loyal to the Marxist programme became the Official IRA (OIRA), yet they very much now formed a rump grouping, lacking the dynamism and firebrand radicalism of the PIRA membership. Cathal Goulding, the Chief of Staff of the

⁸² J. Bowyer-Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA, 1916-1979* (Revised Edition) (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1989), p.366.

⁸³ Ibid, pp.366-68.

Official's, declared in an interview in late 1970 that he felt there were three primary reasons for the split: inherent class divisions with the organisation; divisions over the issue of paramilitary participation; and divisions over the preparedness of the organisation to engage in an armed struggle.⁸⁴ The effect of this schism was that by a year in to the Troubles both wings of the IRA were, as J. Bowyer-Bell concedes, 'thin on the ground... and were quite incapable of harnessing or directing any spontaneous mass movement.'⁸⁵ This in large part explains the latent inability of either IRA faction to posit itself as the guardian of the Catholic community in the face of the civil disturbances of 1969-70 and allow the British Army to be seen as the early protector of Catholic areas as unionist violence flared.

Yet as the Troubles escalated and the British Army's actions in riot control situations turned Catholic feeling against the soldiers, the PIRA found itself in the ascendancy given its radical appeal to young republicans devoid of ideological inclinations towards a Marxist state but energised by violent appeals for 'Brit's Out'. Significantly, when the IRA split occurred in early 1970, nine of the eleven IRA Belfast company commanders pledged their allegiance to the PIRA, ensuring it received near exclusive control of the city.⁸⁶ In an attempt to harness its organisational capabilities to reflect its status as the main republican paramilitary group, the PIRA modelled its organisational structure upon that of the British Army, having Brigades broken down into battalions, which themselves broke down into companies. The executive authority overseeing this new

⁸⁴ Cathal Goulding, 'The New Strategy of the IRA', *New Left Review*, No.65 (Nov/Dec 1970), pp.56-7.

⁸⁵ Bowyer-Bell, *The Secret Army*, p.374.

⁸⁶ English, *Armed Struggle*, p.114.

model army was to be a seven person Army Council. However, by 1977 the PIRA attempted to adapt its organisational structure in the face of new strategic imperatives (as discussed in the next section). It shifted away from its army style division and adopted a new cellular structure at grassroots level with the adoption of Active Service Units as the atom of IRA organisation. The group also initiated changes at the top. An autonomous 'Northern Command' was established in Belfast to prosecute the campaign in Northern Ireland independent of the GHQ in Dublin.⁸⁷ This restructuring also included the establishment of an internal Security Department specifically to wheedle out British agents and informers within their own ranks in the wake of several high profile exposures of British intelligence infiltration of the group.⁸⁸ Therefore, what emerges is a picture of gradual organisational evolution for the PIRA. This process was concerted but slower, albeit less contested within the movement, than the evolution of its strategic and tactical approach.

IRA Strategy and Tactics

At the first session of the new Provisional Army Council in January 1970, the PIRA's executive body enunciated a three-point strategy that would essentially remain unchanged for the duration of the Troubles: defend Catholic areas; to retaliate to perceived acts of British Army violence; and gear all operations towards the ultimate

⁸⁷ Taylor, *Provos*, p.213.

⁸⁸ Perhaps the most notorious IRA informer was an IRA brigade quartermaster, Eamon Molloy, who fed British intelligence tips on imminent attacks and the location of leadership meetings. Molloy's information led to the arrest of suspected IRA member Gerry Adams in July 1973. Molloy's role was uncovered by the IRA and he was executed in 1975. Molloy's case is thought to have prompted the establishment of the Security Department. See English, *Armed Struggle*, p.134 & 156.

goal of 'Brit's Out.'⁸⁹ Yet the Army Council acknowledged that this strategy could not be fully enacted until the rank and file of the PIRA were sufficient in quality and quantity – a position not reached arguably until mid-1971. In the meantime, the PIRA undertook crude attacks on security and economic targets of importance to the British Army and the unionist population. Once organisational competence had been achieved in 1971, pre-planned acts of violence by semi-autonomous PIRA battalions were channelled into a more cohesive strategic effort. Indeed, it can be argued that the IRA was strategically consistent in the first decade of the Troubles and it was only at the tactical level that changes and innovations were initiated.⁹⁰ Aside from the 1977 adoption of the 'long war' strategy to reflect accepted notions of the longevity of their struggle and the seeming immovability of the British presence in the short-to-medium term, the IRA stuck by the main strategic planks proposed in 1970. Yet on a tactical and operational level, the IRA instigated two major shifts in their approach. The first was the introduction of car bombings, and the second was the opening of another front in the war by instigating operations on the British mainland.

The adoption of a bombing campaign in England was decided against by the PIRA leadership in 1972 – their self-proclaimed 'Year of Victory'. However, support within the Belfast grassroots for taking the fight to British soil overwhelmed the initial caution

⁸⁹ Taylor, *Provos*, p.70.

⁹⁰ Tactical adaptations included stretching cheese wire across roads in republican areas in an effort to decapitate the commanders of Ferret patrol vehicles whose heads stuck out the top. Other innovations included attempts to get around the problem of the switch-off of street lights at night-time that was undertaken to prevent clear opportunities for IRA snipers to pick-off army or RUC after dark patrols. The IRA began painting walls in their Belfast strongholds white so as British soldiers would be silhouetted against its backdrop thus offering their snipers an enhanced possibility of a kill. For discussion of these IRA tactics and how the British army counter-acted them see the testimonies in Wharton, *A Long, Long War*, pp.73 &76.

of the Dublin-based GHQ who held reservations as to its operational viability and perceptions of tactical gimmickry. Indeed, such opinions would have been hardened by the Official IRA's bombing of the Parachute Regiment's barracks in Aldershot in February 1972, in retaliation for Bloody Sunday. The attack killed no soldiers but claimed the lives of six civilian maintenance personnel and a chaplain. The backlash at this blunder even within the republican community proved fatal for the OIRA, as they declared an indefinite ceasefire in May 1972. However, as Gary McGladdery points out, the PIRA's decision to eventually open a second front on the mainland was driven by two wider strategic catalysts. First was the desire to turn British public opinion away from maintaining troops in Northern Ireland and thus encourage Whitehall to cut and run from the province. Second, after internment and Operation Motorman, 'the PIRA's ability to carry out operations in Northern Ireland was becoming increasingly constrained' as British intelligence improved their penetration and monitoring of the group.⁹¹ As a consequence the PIRA initiated its first attack in England by detonating bombs outside the Old Bailey and on Whitehall on 8 March 1972. Yet even when the campaign was underway the wider republican movement remained split in their attitude towards indiscriminate bombings of civilian targets – a schism that was intensified after the November 1974 Birmingham pub bombings and the subsequent anti-Irish backlash in Britain and the hurried passage of the Prevention of Terrorism Act through Parliament, which proscribed the IRA.⁹²

⁹¹ Gary McGladdery, *The Provisional IRA in England: The Bombing Campaign 1973-1997* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), p.58.

⁹² Ibid, p.94.

The second major tactical shift adopted by the IRA was the introduction of car bombs as a means of concomitantly making Ulster seem ungovernable for Stormont and London, whilst also tying down and tiring out the resources and manpower of the security forces. Just weeks after the attacks in London, the IRA detonated its first car bomb in Belfast, killing six people and injuring over one hundred on 20 March 1972. This deadly new tactical innovation would become a staple element of the IRA's operational output for the remainder of the Troubles. The car bomb tactic was the most devastating terrorist method utilised by the IRA.

Yet it remains significant that perhaps its most effective tactical novelty was entirely passive. In the autumn of 1976 a politicised campaign was instigated amongst IRA members incarcerated in Ulster's prisons in support of their re-categorisation as political prisoners. Three hundred IRA suspects were engaged in the so-called 'blanket protest' by 1978, refusing to wear prison regulation clothing and instead wearing nothing but the blankets from their cells in an attempt to force the re-introduction of Special Category Status in prison. The protest was not successful, but significantly raised the profile of the IRA leadership and made for uncomfortable political pressure upon the British government. It also paved the way for the escalation of passive prison protests by IRA members with the adoption of the 'dirty protest' in March 1978 when personal hygiene became a political weapon, and for the start of the hunger strikes in the 1980s. Such tactical initiatives, as opposed to changes in the terror campaign, were designed to augment the IRA's political message and manipulate areas of the Troubles where

security force or British 'repression' or 'coercion' could be developed into more effective republican narratives.

In the opinion of J. Bowyer Bell, the IRA was 'in tactical matter most conservative,' pointing to the near exclusive utilisation of bombings and assassinations.⁹³ Bell highlights other tactical avenues that the IRA chose not to pursue, such as plane hijackings, kidnap of leading Protestant politicians, poison or gas attacks, for reasons he argues were down to a 'lack of appropriate resources.'⁹⁴ However, Bell's analysis fundamentally misconceives the relationship that the IRAs tactics had upon its overarching strategy. The IRA consciously avoided the adoption of acts of catastrophic mass terrorism in the early Troubles not because of a resource hindrance but because of the inescapably domestic nature of the conflict. Political and social outrage from both sides of the republican-unionist divide were a natural occurrence in the aftermath of atrocities, as the backlash at Bloody Sunday and Bloody Friday attest. In such a domestic conflict, tactical exuberance detrimentally affects strategic attainment. The IRA's primary strategic goal was to force the British to withdraw from Northern Ireland. The deaths of large numbers of civilians, as post-1979 attacks such as the Remembrance Day attack in Enniskillen in 1987 or the Real IRA's 1998 attack in Omagh brutally demonstrated, have a counter-productive effect upon insurgent strategic aims as they inherently strain the ties of trust with the indigenous population who groups purport to protect, whilst also damaging their cause in the eyes of international opinion. Spectacular acts of

⁹³ J. Bowyer Bell, 'An Irish War: The IRA's Armed Struggle, 1969-90 – Strategy as History Rules OK', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.1 No.3 (December 1990), p.260.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.260.

catastrophic terrorism on a consistent and mass scale were never adopted by the IRA not for reasons of resources but for reasons of strategic clarity. In many ways acts at the opposite end of the strategic scale, namely the prison protests, did more for furthering the republican cause than any act of catastrophic terrorism would have. Crucially, this was able to occur because such tactics harnessed the support of its societal support base.

Internal Insurgent Support

Despite the initial stigma of its actions in the Bogside riots, the IRA soon became the self-styled guardian of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. The blurred national-religious nature of the conflict ensured that whilst only a minority of the republican/Catholic community volunteered for the IRA, there was undeniably more widespread tacit support, not necessarily for violent terrorist means, but for the disruption of British rule as a whole. Indeed, the heavy-handed actions of the British, in particular the introduction of internment and the events of Bloody Sunday, served to galvanise the community against the presence of troops, hence increasing the implicit internal support for the IRA's strategy, if not their tactics. As one IRA volunteer, Seamus Finucane, attested: 'There was a sense that this was the time to change things and stop being pushed around, stop being downtrodden... The politics of the struggle ended up taking over our lives.'⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Quoted in Toolis, *Rebel Hearts*, p.105.

When the Troubles broke out in the summer of 1969 the IRA was a husk group, with few funds, even fewer arms and little support outside the older generation for whom the Easter Rising was a direct inspiration. Yet as Richard English astutely observes, for a significant portion of the swell of post-1969 recruits, their dedication to armed conflict was not solely reliant on reaction to unfolding acts of perceived British oppression, but often stemmed from deeper social catalysts like ‘family, locality [and] tradition.’⁹⁶ Many leading IRA members were third generation republicans who were steeped in the history of the anti-British struggle. Belonging to the IRA was to be woven into the social fabric of the wider republican tradition, to be a part of the revered ranks of republicans that were celebrated from Wolfe Tone to Michael Connolly. Perhaps more than any other insurgent opponent that the British faced in the late twentieth century, Irish republicanism was rooted deep in the society from which it sprang, and was inexplicably inter-twined with long-standing social, religious and political grievances. To that extent, the IRA was able to rely in the early phases of the Troubles on an extensive support network within Northern Ireland’s republican strongholds, whilst also capitalising on the excessive force occasionally unleashed by the British military in order to radicalise the angry young men of Ulster’s Catholic housing estates as it engaged the security forces in a race to learn the path to tactical effectiveness. As fear of reprisals for suspected collusion with the security forces emanated within the wider Catholic community, it became clear that support for the IRA was predicated not only upon an implicit support for ‘Brit’s Out’ if not an explicit backing for terrorist means, but was also based as much on fear as it was on outright conviction. Narratives, carefully fostered by IRA propagandists, of minority persecution played to the republican and wider Catholic

⁹⁶ English, *Armed Struggle*, p.129.

perception of discrimination and subjugation. John Newsinger even goes as far as to suggest that: ‘there can be little doubt that if the Catholics had been the majority community, the British would have been forced to withdraw...’⁹⁷ Although counter-factual, Newsinger’s point raises the wider issue surrounding the integral importance of securing the support of ‘loyalist’ indigenous elements in counter-insurgency campaigns. Attaining high levels of domestic loyalism within Malaya and Kenya proved crucial to British efforts to stem insurgent support in vulnerable rural and urban areas. Although ‘loyalism’ carries paramilitary connotations in the Northern Irish context, in its wider meaning pertaining to the support granted the counter-insurgent force by sections of the indigenous population, the broad congruence of the British and unionist political agenda relating to Northern Ireland’s continued membership of the United Kingdom again demonstrates the perennial importance of localised support for the counter-insurgent strategy. Yet despite the finite support it received within Ulster an element of IRA support that significantly bolstered the movement came from outside Northern Ireland’s borders.

External Insurgent Support

Notoriously under-funded and under-armed at the outset of the new ‘Troubles’, and soon squeezed by security force crackdowns and raids, the IRA sought supplies from a number of sources to replenish their arsenal and perpetuate the armed struggle. One of

⁹⁷ Newsinger, ‘From Counter-Insurgency to Internal Security’, p.93.

the most prominent supply channels came from the Irish diaspora in the United States. Weaponry was smuggled across the Atlantic, whilst money was raised in large quantities to support the cause of the 'old country'. This was to prove the most crucial element to the external support dynamic of the first decade of the Troubles and did much to frustrate counter-insurgent efforts to weaken the IRA.

At the outbreak of the Troubles, the United States had five times as many Irish citizens as Ireland itself.⁹⁸ This sizeable kinship network provided a substantial transatlantic constituency favourable to the republican cause, steeped as it was in romantic visions of a united Ireland. Dormant American interest in Northern Ireland was sparked by the civil rights marches on summer 1969 and the subsequent degeneration into violence. Groups and associations sprang up in an effort to channel solidarity and money to Ulster, mainly by civil rights organisations. However, such groups were counter-balanced by the foundation of groups favouring a more interventionist and direct approach. Most significant of these was the Irish Northern Aid Committee (Noraid) that was created by an emigrant IRA veteran, Michael Flannery, in 1970. Noraid became a vehicle through which many 'old warriors' and their families felt they could reconnect with the new struggle for republicanism. The group quickly organised an extensive programme of fundraising events across the US, from testimonial dinners to whip-rounds in Irish bars. This money (some \$3 million in total by 1986) was channelled by Noraid back to Northern Ireland, purportedly to the families of republican prisoners, yet suspected by the British and Irish governments to have been knowingly diverted to purchase arms for

⁹⁸ Bishop and Mallie, *The Provisional IRA*, p.294.

the PIRA.⁹⁹ Such concerns were heightened by the sporadic presence of Joe Cahill, PIRA Chief of Staff, in America on false passports to undertake fundraising trips ostensibly for Sinn Fein. Cahill was an acknowledged go-between for Noraid and the PIRA, prompting transatlantic intelligence investigations into his activities.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, Cahill was not the only individual with IRA links to be manipulating American support for the armed struggle. Leading IRA figure Sean Kennan was sent to the US in late 1969 to cultivate an arms supply network with American suppliers. Resultant of Kennan's visit was the first American shipment of arms to the IRA, which arrived in Ireland from Philadelphia in August 1970. This cache of Armalites drastically modernised the IRA's aging arsenal of outdated weapons.¹⁰¹ This initial phase of American arms purchasing was undertaken on a relatively small scale in an attempt to detract the attention of the intelligence agencies. Preferred methods involved IRA agents travelling to gun fairs in the American mid-West and then transporting purchased weapons back to Ireland via air and sea ports on the east coast of the US with the assisted corroboration of pro-republican elements within the longshoreman's union and US Customs. Yet the IRA was forced to find alternative methods and routes from October 1971 onwards when Irish police found six unclaimed suitcases of guns and ammunition at terminals in Dublin.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Adrian Guelke, *Northern Ireland: The International Perspective* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988), p.131 (fn. 7).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.135.

¹⁰¹ Bishop and Mallie, *The Provisional IRA*, p.295.

¹⁰² Ibid, p.295.

Intelligence efforts to diminish the impact that American support had upon the potency of the IRA were sharpened by the active involvement of the FBI in cracking down on American-based IRA fundraisers and arms procurers in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Bureau agents infiltrated Noraid after intelligence revealed that two of the five Americans who organised the IRA's first gun shipment out of Philadelphia in 1970 were Noraid officers. FBI operations led to the arrest of one of the IRAs primary arms suppliers, a New York-based Corsican with mafia connections, George De Meo, in 1980. De Meo had supplied the IRA with a shipment of M60 machine guns stolen from a US National Guard armoury in August 1976, and had been organising biannual arms consignments to Ireland since then.¹⁰³ Further FBI infiltration operations (resultant from information gleaned from De Meo after his arrest in return for leniency) revealed other key American links to IRA weapons smuggling, including a Brooklyn security guard, George Harrison, who was believed to be the IRA's main arms supplier in the US, with the FBI estimating he had organised the delivery of over 2,500 weapons to the IRA.¹⁰⁴ FBI wire tap intercepts uncovered direct contact between Harrison and Noraid chief Michael Flannery in which Harrison was attempting to solicit \$17,000 of Noraid money to fund a shipment of grenade launchers for the IRA. Both were arrested, although their subsequent trial collapsed after the jury accepted the defences' argument that the sting operation had been illegally engineered by the CIA.¹⁰⁵ Such a set back frustrated the British. A leaked British Army intelligence report estimated that by 1979 the PIRA's known annual income stood at £950,000, of which £120,000 was known to come from

¹⁰³ Ibid, p.298.

¹⁰⁴ Taylor, *Provos*, p.1.

¹⁰⁵ Bishop and Mallie, *The Provisional IRA*, p.298.

overseas, with half of that sum coming direct from Noraid.¹⁰⁶ Such British concern over the American link was heightened by estimates that by 1975 up to 85% of all PIRA weapons were thought to have been shipped from America.¹⁰⁷ In a speech to the Association of American Correspondents in London in December 1975 Prime Minister Harold Wilson took the opportunity to upbraid ‘the financing of IRA terror, brutality and murder by misguided Irish-American sympathisers’, warning American backers that they were ‘playing the role of vicarious merchants of death.’¹⁰⁸ Even the Chief of Staff of the Official IRA, Cathal Goulding, was ready to admit before his group disbanded that there was a link between the perpetuation of republican violence in Northern Ireland and American money: ‘They [supporters in America] couldn’t support us financially unless there was some form of revolutionary activity... [T]hey would only support those that were using force alone.’¹⁰⁹ Such an admission, together with the intelligence picture built up by agencies on both sides of the Atlantic, generates a depiction of American funding as the most influential element of the external support dynamic propagating republican paramilitary activities in the early phase of the Troubles. It was, however, not the only outside dimension to influence the IRA.

Sinn Féin president Ruairi Ó Bradaigh fostered links in the early 1970s with fellow European nationalist groups in the Basque country, Corsica and the Breton region of France. In 1972 it was a meeting with Breton nationalists that led to contact, initiated by

¹⁰⁶ Guelke, *Northern Ireland*, p. 133 (fn 7).

¹⁰⁷ Andrew J. Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster Conflict, 1968-1995* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1995), p.90.

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, *Final Term*, pp.205-06. Also see *TNA*, CJ 4/1411 for text of full speech.

¹⁰⁹ Goulding, ‘The New Strategy of the IRA’, p.58.

the separatist Frenchmen, with the Libyan regime of Colonel Qaddafi. In August of that year PIRA Chief of Staff Joe Cahill and PIRA Quartermaster Denis McInerney met with members of the Libyan Intelligence Service (LIS) in Poland, hoping to extract supplies from a government who were already espousing rhetorical support for the IRA's cause. The LIS complied, and agreed to supply money and weapons, smuggled through a mutually agreed route. This would be managed by an IRA overseer who became permanently based in Tripoli, lauded with semi-ambassadorial status.¹¹⁰ However, the Libyan-IRA connection was exposed on 23 March 1973 when a Cypriot-registered boat, the 'Claudia', was intercepted off the coast of Ireland carrying Cahill and nearly 500 Libyan-supplied weapons.¹¹¹ Despite this exposure, covert Libyan funding for the IRA still flowed. By 1975, Qaddafi's regime had supplied the group with \$3.5million, but would dry up soon after as relations between Tripoli and the IRA 'ambassador' deteriorated until a resurgence of funds began again in the 1980s.¹¹² The Libyan, and especially the American, connection to the IRA armed struggle highlights the impact that external support can have upon the potency and longevity of an insurgency. Foreign money and weapons consistently replenished the IRA's coffers and arsenals, undermining domestic counter-insurgency efforts to restrict IRA supply sources and weaken its paramilitary capabilities. Yet adding to such politico-military efforts in the fight against the IRA was the intense scrutiny of the campaign by the international community.

¹¹⁰ Maloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, pp.8-9.

¹¹¹ Taylor, *Provos*, p.156.

¹¹² Maloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, p.9.

The International Dimension

Concomitant with the influence of American supporters upon the level of external support for IRA paramilitary activities was American political pressure upon the British government over Northern Ireland. Again, American influence was arguably the most prevalent element of the international dimension to the Northern Ireland conflict. Legislative and executive branch interest in the Troubles was spawned from effective pressure group lobbying. Among groups pressing for American diplomatic intervention in Ulster was the Irish National Caucus, created in 1974, who maintained a hardline stance of the issue of a united Ireland that despite being at odds with mainstream nationalism within Ulster still managed to exert influence over Congressional opinion. The Caucus successfully petitioned for the establishment of the Ad Hoc Congressional Committee for Irish Affairs in 1977. This committee formalised the already long-standing involvement that a core of leading Democrats had with promoting pro-nationalist solutions. Known as the 'Four Horsemen', Senator Edward Kennedy, Speaker Tip O'Neill, Governor Hugh Carey and Senator Patrick Moynihan, had long stood on a moderate nationalist platform and provided a transatlantic mouthpiece for criticism at perceived British heavy-handedness in Northern Ireland. Events such as the introduction of internment (the 'nadir of British policy in Ulster,' according to Kennedy¹¹³) and Bloody Sunday provoked fierce condemnation as the Troubles transcended its essential domesticity to become an internationalised conflict via the spread of media coverage and especially via the intercessions of the powerful Irish-

¹¹³ Edward Kennedy, 'Ulster is an International Issue', *Foreign Policy*, No.11 (Summer 1973) p.60.

American lobby.¹¹⁴ The Four Horsemen brought their influence to bear during the Carter years, after the Nixon administration had shown little enthusiasm for interfering in what it deemed an essentially British matter. In 1977 the quartet persuaded Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to adopt the so-called 'Friends of Ireland' agenda as administration policy. In August 1977 President Carter openly condemned the use of violence and reprisal by both sides, encouraged cross-community dialogue and promised to fund relief efforts once peace had been achieved. For the first time since the Troubles began, Northern Ireland had been explicitly identified as a legitimate plank of the American foreign policy agenda. British suspicions at Carter's intervention were crystallised in August 1979 when the State Department suspended all American arms supplies to the RUC, in a move usually reserved for regimes guilty of human rights abuses and designed to embarrass the British into adopting a more nuanced approach to policing. Yet by the end of his presidency Carter had become embroiled in the Iranian hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, detracting him from pressuring the British over Northern Ireland. Yet such distractions would also infuse an element of the Cold War into the long war in Ulster.

The rhetoric of anti-imperialism and the dogmatic Marxism of the Official IRA in particular pricked Soviet interest in the Northern Ireland Troubles. The British government was especially concerned in the early years of the conflict as to just what level of participation the Soviets would seek in an attempt to exacerbate Cold War

¹¹⁴ For a picture of the international, and in particular the American, response to the introduction of internment see, *TNA FCO 33/1471*, 'Foreign Reactions Towards Internment in Northern Ireland'.

enmities with Britain by interfering in Ulster. Edward Heath was worried enough to share intelligence material with the Irish Taoiseach Jack Lynch in March 1972 to warn him off establishing full diplomatic links with the USSR, writing to Dublin that: ‘a recent defector has told us that the KGB are taking a close interest in the Irish situation and that a KGB officer has already discussed with the Secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland his request for arms for the IRA.’¹¹⁵ British Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Home had already written to Heath expressing his concern as to the perceived ‘positive Soviet attitude to the IRA.’¹¹⁶ Only minor arms shipments seem to have been made between the Soviets and Irish republicans, ensuring that its influence remained primarily ‘educational and propagandist.’¹¹⁷

Taken holistically, therefore, a picture of the Troubles emerges in a strong international context. Several scholars, in particular Adrian Guelke and Michael Cox, have long been proponents of utilising the international dimension through which to interpret the multiple layers of interest and influence over the course of the conflict.¹¹⁸ The assertion of American political leverage over the Troubles remains the single most important external element of the conflict, and arguably that still remains the case in post-Good

¹¹⁵ TNA, PREM 15/1046, ‘Secret and Personal: Letter from Prime Minister to Mr Lynch, 1 March 1972.’ Indeed, Heath’s intelligence seems to have been outdated. As far back as November 1969, before the IRA split, the group’s leadership used Irish Communist Party leader Michael O’Riordan as a conduit through which to request a Soviet arms shipment. KGB Chief Yuri Andropov personally considered the request, and it took two and a half years before he felt assured that Soviet involvement could be kept secret before he authorised a shipment of 2 machine guns, 70 rifles and 10 pistols to what by then had become the Official IRA (see Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive II: The KGB and the World* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp.492-502).

¹¹⁶ TNA, PREM 15/1046, ‘Secret: From Alec Douglas-Home to PM, 26 February 1972.’

¹¹⁷ Coogan, *The IRA*, p.435.

¹¹⁸ In particular see Guelke, *Northern Ireland: The International Perspective*; Cox, ‘Rethinking the International and Northern Ireland: A Defence’, in Cox, Guelke and Stephen (ed), *A Farewell to Arms*.

Friday Agreement Ulster. The lobbying power of the Irish-Americans inside and outside Congress, when combined with the external support directly offered to the IRA by American and Libyan sympathisers in particular, had a tangible impact upon the Troubles on both a political and paramilitary level. The official end of 'Operation Banner' report by the Ministry of Defence utterly misrepresents the influence of the international dimension, when it states in a vein of understatement that: 'The rest of the world was, by and large, little more than an audience to the drama in Northern Ireland.'¹¹⁹ They were not merely the audience. They were part of the cast.

Reflecting on the early Northern Irish Troubles

By January 1979, nearly ten years into the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the British Army had 13,311 troops in the province. These numbers were augmented by 8,684 mainly part-time members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and 6,110 RUC police officers.¹²⁰ The militarisation of everyday life in Ulster was underlined not only by this ubiquitous security presence but by the infusion of paramilitary activity with community life, by the fierce inter-connectedness of national and religious identities, and by the seemingly incessant cycle of attack and counter-attacks that cast a cloud of violence over Northern Ireland.

¹¹⁹ MoD, 'Operation Banner', para.317.

¹²⁰ Garrett, 'Ten Years of British Troops in Northern Ireland,' p.80.

The 1970s represented the bloody peak of violence in Ulster and showcased the best and the worst of the British Army's counter-insurgency approach. The short-circuiting of context in its lesson transferral process from previous conflicts, notably from Yemen, caused an un-nuanced tactical repertoire to be unleashed against republican paramilitaries without adequate discernment for the treatment of the wider Catholic community. In short, there was a failure to adapt to the domestic nature of the Troubles, and to therefore appreciate the difficulties of undertaking counter-insurgency operations in the midst of effectively a civil war. For this reason emerged some operational conduct that aggravated the insurgent opposition and the community from which they were drawn. In this vein, Robert White and Terry Falkenberg White have helpfully distinguished between what they characterise as 'formal' acts of British 'repression' (in this context, 'suppression' might be a more useful term to apply), such as the state-sanctioned implementation of internment, and 'informal' acts, as exemplified by the actions of individual state agents, such as the actions of Parachute Regiment soldiers on Bloody Sunday.¹²¹

These 'formal' and 'informal' acts of suppression were indicative of inconsistent political management and an over-zealous military engagement with the Troubles. Too often were central strands of Britain's civil-military counter-insurgency approach counter-productive, as was demonstrated with early riot control methods and the introduction of internment. Such heavy-handedness was replete with colonial-era

¹²¹ Robert W. White and Terry Falkenberg White, 'Repression and the Liberal State: The Case of Northern Ireland, 1969-72', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.39 No.2 (June 1995), p.332.

echoes, wholly inappropriate to the suppression of civil disturbance and domestic insurgency. Such a lack of sophistication, from the tactical to the strategic levels, played its part to imbuing the Troubles with an attritional quality that was eventually to rely on stalemate and cross-community clamours for peace in order to pave the way for a comprehensive peace settlement that emerged on Good Friday 1998. There were distinct elements of success in the realm of intelligence for the British that severely undermined IRA efficiency and effectiveness, however such successful infiltrations and cultivation of informers as a means of tipping the intelligence war in the British favour were too often undermined by the highly contentious actions of the British Army or the backlash at political decisions which fanned the flames of violence. Unlike in previous colonial conflicts, the covert war in Northern Ireland was hindered, not aided, by aggressive counter-insurgency campaigning by the regular Army.

On 28 July 2005, just weeks after radical Islamists had brought a different kind of terrorism to the streets of London, the Provisional IRA issued a statement announcing an official end to its armed campaign.¹²² This drew to a close a chapter in the wider story of insurgent violence in Northern Ireland. However, it would be premature to have heralded the end of paramilitary activity in Ulster. The sporadic ability and willingness of IRA splinter groups, notably the Real and Continuity IRAs, have provided intermittent attempts to derail the ongoing forging of a lasting peace in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement. From the Omagh bombing in August 1998 (the single worst atrocity in the bloody history of the recent Troubles, with 29 dead), through to the

¹²² For the full text of this statement see, Maloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, pp.641-42.

efforts to spark a re-ignition of widespread violence in March 2009 with the shooting of two soldiers and a police officer, such splinter groups represent a perilous warning as to the latent albeit narrow presence of dangers to peace in Northern Ireland. As political leaders in Belfast and London grapple with the response to splinter group violence, the military hierarchy would do well to be reminded of the effects of a draconian response to a specific threat. Furthermore, the history of the early conduct of counter-insurgency in Northern Ireland holds not only continuing relevance to managing contemporary residual threats to peace in the province, but also holds a wider significance for subsequent counter-insurgency operations. The post-Operation Banner Ministry of Defence report was right to assert that the British Army's experience in Northern Ireland was a 'landmark', and indeed the lessons that have emanated from the conflict have 'stood the Army in good stead in other theatres and will probably continue to do so for a long time.'¹²³ With the dangers of undertaking urban counter-insurgency in the midst of a *de facto* civil war and the degenerate effects of implementing indiscriminate security measures at the expense of community relations, the British experience in Northern Ireland was a bloody crucible in which to reappraise the national counter-insurgency approach. In this crucible lessons were partially and parenthetically acknowledged, whilst strategy for defeating paramilitary republicanism was suffused with political hesitation and undermined by military heavy-handedness. Indeed, the lessons of the original 'long war' on terror in Northern Ireland were learned the hard way by the British and are of extreme importance to a later yet very different 'war on terror.'

¹²³ MoD, 'Operation Banner,' para.418.

**CHAPTER 7: ‘Magnanimous in Victory? British Counter-Insurgency Efforts in
Iraq’**

*‘I went up the Tigris with one hundred Devon Territorials, young, clean
delightful fellows... By them one saw vividly how great it was to be their
kin, and English. And we were casting them by thousands into the fire to
the worst of deaths, not to win the war but that the corn and rice and oil
of Mesopotamia might be ours.’*

T.E. Lawrence,

*‘Seven Pillars of Wisdom’*¹

In one of the most renowned pre-battle speeches of the modern era, Colonel Tim Collins of the 1st Battalion, Royal Irish Regiment urged his troops on the eve of the Iraq war: ‘if you are ferocious in battle remember to be magnanimous in victory.’ That victory would take less than two months from the first ‘shock and awe’ air strikes on Baghdad on 20 March 2003 to President Bush declaring ‘mission accomplished’ on 1 May. In reality, only a fraction of the battle had been fought. Saddam may have been toppled, but a Pandora’s Box of ethnic, religious and nationalist insurgent violence was unleashed by

¹ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1997), p.7.

this highly controversial war. With the official withdrawal of British combat troops complete by May 2009, magnanimous conduct became eclipsed by poor strategic planning and underwhelming operational performance. If Iraq represents the culmination of sixty years worth of ‘modern’ counter-insurgency lesson learning then the results have been disconcerting.

The UK Armed Forces were one of twenty-seven national forces that made up the Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNF-I). The coalition’s military control of Iraq saw the country split into six main Areas of Responsibility (AORs), with the British providing the leadership in Multi-National Division (South East) (MND(SE)). This sector encompassed the four provinces of Basra, Maysan, Dhi Qar and Muthanna, where the vast majority of Britain’s troops were deployed. The initial post-conflict stage was a relatively quiet period in southern Iraq as operations focussed on securing the oil fields and the long stretch of border with Iran. However, pre-war expectations that post-Saddam resistance would be low were massively misguided resulting in insufficient preparedness for the British, as well as the American, army. In late 2005 the security situation in and around Basra deteriorated significantly as a result of local competition amongst rival militant groups for political and economic control in the region. Attacks on British troops increased, as did violence between rival Shia factions. This conflict environment facing the British in southern Iraq was tangibly different from that facing the Americans in Baghdad and the infamous ‘Sunni Triangle’ in central Iraq, particularly in relation to the quantity of foreign jihadists belonging to such groups as Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Sectarian violence in Basra reached a bloody crescendo in May 2006 forcing the

Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, to declare a month-long state of emergency, testing the efficacy of contemporary British counter-insurgency tactics. A controversial withdrawal to an 'overwatch' role at Basra airport in September 2007 created a security vacuum in the city that was filled by the militias and was arguably not plugged until the joint Iraqi-American 'Operation Charge of the Knights', which largely bypassed British involvement in 2008. Slow burning strategies that have unfolded in counter-insurgency campaigns previous to Iraq have relied upon harnessing eventual operational competence and success. This was a catalyst absent in Iraq. Even a slow burning strategy needs kindling and a flame. The British performance in Iraq provided neither.

Strategy and tactics, both military and political, utilised in Iraq will be examined in this chapter in the context of experiences in the other case studies. Observations have been abound as to the imperative of joining-up political and military actions in the transitional phase of government along the lines of Templer's Malaya model², as well as in regard to the value and ability to implement lessons from the experience in Northern Ireland.³ Indeed, the majority of the burden of blame for the admittedly insufficient and under-prepared response to post-conflict violence lies with the political community who initially engineered the war. Blair's decision to join Bush in the invasion of Iraq caused enormous political ructions as well as creating unprecedented scenarios for the British

² John Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam (new edition)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2005); Steven Metz, 'Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 27 No.1 (Winter 2003-04), p.33.

³ John Keegan, *The Iraq War* (London: Hutchinson, 2004), pp.175 & 180.

military, of which a sizeable literature has emerged.⁴ Not only did they prepare for and deploy into one form of warfare (a conventional land invasion) and had to adapt to eventually fight a different category of warfare altogether (counter-insurgency), they also had to contend with junior coalition partner status in an asymmetric conflict for the first time.⁵ In such a politicised conflict environment, stemming from the British retreat from Aden and South Yemen in the late 1960s, Whitehall has retained the capacity to politicise the missions of the army, control the level of troop numbers and the timing of any future withdrawal, all within a context of tightly controlled spending for military operations. Over-simplified, perhaps naïve, assumptions as to the reaction of the Iraqi population upon the toppling of Saddam Hussein and his Ba’athist regime belied a complex welter of ethnic, tribal and religious responses to the coalition control of the country. Talk of ‘liberation’ seemed to come from the lips of occupiers. As a consequence, counter-insurgency in Iraq was, firstly, not expected to be the primary mode of warfare, and therefore secondly, had to be painfully re-learned. In short, the war eventually fought to secure the political imperative of engineering a democratic Iraq was not the war envisaged by its architects. Where did it all go wrong?

⁴ For example see, Peter Stothard, *30 Days: A Month at the Heart of Blair’s War* (London: Harper Collins, 2003); William Shawcross, *Allies: The US, Britain, Europe and the War in Iraq* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003); David Coates and Joel Krieger (with Rhiannon Vickers), *Blair’s War* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004); Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004); John Dumbrell, ‘Working with Allies: The United States, the United Kingdom, and the War on Terror’, *Politics and Policy*, Vol.34 No.2 (2006), pp.452-472.

⁵ A point acknowledged in the General Staff’s report ‘Stability Operations in Iraq: An Analysis from a Land Perspective’ (Army Code 71844), p.17, para.44.

Prelude to Insurgency: Saddam, WMD, and ‘Shock and Awe’

That the Iraq war was the most controversial conflict in the modern era remains one of the most prevalent truisms in contemporary international relations. The Bush administration’s post-9/11 conceptualisation of an ‘axis of evil’ constituting rogue states desirous of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) paved the way for the invasion of Iraq, augmented by erroneous intelligence claims, neo-conservative threat perceptions, and Bush family ‘unfinished business.’ The notion of a ‘pre-emptive war’ retained an unprecedented position in legal, political, and ethical terms, requiring a forceful justification to counter-act the rejoinders of illegality, illegitimacy and immorality. Intelligence material claiming Saddam not only possessed WMD but could deploy them in forty-five minutes came to dominate the narrative that marketed the war as a just one. Not only did this push Anglo-American intelligence agencies from their preferred residence as arbiter of secrets and private councillor to governments into the political limelight, but it also set new benchmarks for the publication of intelligence material as a politicised tool to secure seemingly pre-determined aims. Behind the ‘slam dunk’ of intelligence material, the American push for war also needed a greater veneer of political legitimacy by garnering international support in the form of a ‘coalition of the willing’. A total of 27 countries provided troops for this coalition that would eventually invade Iraq in March 2003. Yet the distribution of the burden of removing Saddam would not be as even as the size of the coalition would seemingly present. The US would supply 91% of all combat troops in the initial invasion with their initial contingent of 424,000.⁶

⁶ Timothy Garden, ‘Iraq: The Military Campaign’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 79 No.4 (2003), p.703.

The second largest military grouping was the 41,000 British troops sent into battle by Tony Blair – one third of the non-US coalition force.⁷

The British decision to join the American-led invasion of Iraq affected international depictions of Britain's role in the world, especially given characterisations of Blair as Bush's 'poodle'.⁸ It also led to a large domestic backlash towards Blair, his government and an increasingly unpopular war. Yet what remains significant is that the American's did not need the physical presence of British troops (or indeed any other coalition troops) to achieve the goal of toppling Saddam (US troops outnumbered UK troops by 10:1), but British involvement provided political symbolism that denoted international consensus and moral legitimacy.⁹ In the wake of his crucial meeting with Bush at the president's Texas ranch in April 2002, Blair began asserting the threat from Saddam with 'archbishopric certainty'.¹⁰ Yet for a politician acutely aware of creating a legacy, the invasion of Iraq will quite possibly be written by the self-invoked 'hand of history' as being 'Tony Blair's Vietnam', predicated upon his steadfast, if not fawning, belief that standing 'shoulder to shoulder' with the Americans buttressed a crucial alliance and strengthened the 'forces for good' in the world.¹¹ Blair's missionary zeal to tackle Iraq conjoined with Bush's Manichean conception of international relations. The invasion of Iraq would therefore be a heady mix of idealism, vindication and faulty intelligence.

⁷ Keegan, *The Iraq War*, p.66.

⁸ For example, see James K. Wither, 'British Bulldog or Bush's Poodle? Anglo-American Relations and the Iraq War', *Parameters* (Winter 2003-04), pp.67-82.

⁹ Caroline Kennedy-Pipe and Rhiannon Vickers, 'Blowback' for Britain? Blair, Bush and the War in Iraq', *Review of International Studies*, Vol.33 No.2 (2007), p.208.

¹⁰ Lloyd C. Gardiner, 'Damned High Wire': On the Special Relationship that Unites Bush and Blair in Iraq', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, Vol.3 No.1 (2005), p.44.

¹¹ Alex Danchev, 'Tony Blair's Vietnam': The Iraq War and the 'Special Relationship' in Historical Perspective', *Review of International Studies*, Vol.33 No.2 (2007), pp.189-203.

Post-Invasion Politics: The Political Management of Counter-Insurgency in Iraq

Essential to an appreciation of the political management of the British counter-insurgency campaign in Iraq is the disaggregating of Whitehall control over the strategic issues, such as troop numbers, longevity of the military presence, and financial supervision of military operations and reconstruction efforts, and the British-mandated political strands of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in southern Iraq, who were responsible for the day-to-day running of the four southern provinces in MND(SE). When the hunt for WMD was exposed as a fallacy, and the tumult of religious and nationalist violence turned against the coalition, there was a tangible reluctance on behalf of the British government to engage in an outright counter-insurgency campaign. Not only did this erode the British military's morale but it also compromised on-the-ground political efforts of British reconstruction and stabilisation teams as misguided pre-invasion Whitehall expectations failed to materialise.¹² When this was combined with consistent government reluctance to provide sufficient financial resources for the provision of adequate equipment the result was strategic stagnancy from London and operational insufficiency in Iraq.¹³

¹² House of Commons Defence Committee (hereafter HCDC), 'Iraq: An Initial Assessment of Post-Conflict Operations', Sixth Report of Session 2004-05 (London: The Stationery Office, 24 March 2005), p.18, para.26.

¹³ For a vivid picture of the meagreness of resources and erratic nature of the British diplomatic and reconstruction effort in southern Iraq see Rory Stewart, *Occupational Hazards: My Time Governing Iraq* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2007); and Hilary Synnott, 'Statebuilding in Southern Iraq', *Survival*, Vol.47 No.2 (2005), pp.33-56.

The main coalition political presence in the British-controlled MND(SE) was the thirty-odd civil-military staff of the Coalition Provisional Authority (South), headed by a regional co-ordinator. The CPA (South), in conjunction with the military command of MND(SE), enunciated four overarching priorities in their sector: security; reconstruction and economic development; democratic governance; and improving Iraqi perceptions of the other three goals.¹⁴ Sir Hilary Synnott, the British co-ordinator in the south between July 2003 and January 2004, has publicly deconstructed the CPA's political efforts to achieve these goals, criticising its highly centralised structure and its unashamed focus on Baghdad as the priority for security and reconstruction operations: 'CPA Headquarters tended to expect the British to sort out the problem for themselves... [This] put the south in danger of being starved of resources...'¹⁵ What resources that did eventually reach the British-administered southern provinces, from money to pay Iraqi civil service wages to food aid, came from the American government and not the British, forcing British administrators in Basra to pay police and civil servants wages with confiscated Ba'thist funds to circumvent the poor flow of finances in the immediate post-invasion period.¹⁶ In Synnott's view, the poor political and financial co-ordination of the CPA was exacerbated by the short 'tours of duty' that most CPA administrators served. The usual three month stints (as opposed to the average six month tours for military personnel) were, Synnott argues, too short to be effective, and as a consequence of such administrative brevity the political management of Iraq as it entered a period of

¹⁴ Synnott, 'Statebuilding in Southern Iraq', p.43.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.40.

¹⁶ Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), p.472.

violent insurgent upheaval would be characterised by a ‘loss of momentum and of experience, and [led] to confusion and dismay on the part of the Iraqis...’¹⁷

Even those sent by Whitehall to bridge the gap between London and Baghdad consistently painted a bleak portrait for the political masters of the counter-insurgency effort. In May 2003, Tony Blair appointed John Sawyers, the British Ambassador to Egypt, as London’s envoy in Baghdad. A short period into his appointment, Sawyers cabled to Whitehall a damning report on the nationwide civil-military counter-insurgency effort, accusing the US military of ‘not providing the security framework needed’, and branding the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA – the short-lived predecessor of the CPA) an ‘unbelievable mess.’ He pushed for ‘an operational UK presence in Baghdad’ to help alleviate the problems but was over-ruled by a Whitehall wary of expanding the UK effort outside the south.¹⁸ Another memo by Sawyers back to London one month later revealed his concerns over ‘how thin is the veneer of security in many parts of Iraq’, given the prevalence of insurgent violence against the Iraqi infrastructure and the increasing radicalisation of young Shias in the south by burgeoning extremist religious movements.¹⁹ The gravity of Sawyers’ grim interpretation of the effectiveness of coalition political control over Iraq is heightened by his role as the leading British diplomat in the country at the outbreak of the insurgency, especially through his selection by CPA chief Paul Bremer to help jointly construct the membership of the Iraqi Governing Council in the summer of

¹⁷ Synnott, ‘Statebuilding in Southern Iraq’, pp.37-8.

¹⁸ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, pp.471-73.

¹⁹ Ibid, pp.488-89.

2003.²⁰ Once full diplomatic relations with Iraq had been re-established by Britain, even British Ambassadors to Iraq had difficulty in presenting a positive political picture. In his final diplomatic telegram, which was leaked to the press, William Patey offered a devastating assessment to the Prime Minister and UK military commanders of the Iraqi situation in mid-2006, three years after Sawyers' initial aspersions: 'civil war and a de facto division of Iraq is probably more likely at this stage than a successful and substantial transition to a stable democracy.'²¹ Depictions of political failure were ubiquitous, in terms of the provision for adequate democratic governance structures to be sufficiently financed and for post-Saddam security and policing to be effectively funded. Reconstruction efforts were to receive equally parlous political co-ordination.

One of the earliest British civil-military reconstruction efforts came in the form of the Emergency Infrastructure Plan (EIP). Spearheaded by the Department for International Development (DFiD), the EIP was an integral British-led programme designed to benefit key services in MND(SE) in the immediate post-invasion period to the tune of \$127million.²² Despite managerial problems, the EIP grew in scope and it achieved moderate success. It funded projects that contributed to the strategic goals of aiding reconstruction, such as rebuilding schools, re-equipping hospitals, and the opening of water purification plants, however, the distribution of this money was haphazard and

²⁰ L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p.93.

²¹ 'Iraq civil war warning for Blair', BBC News website (3 August 2006) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/uk/5240808.stm>

²² Synnott, 'Statebuilding in Southern Iraq', p.47.

access to it obfuscated.²³ Yet so poor were civil-military relations in the first few years after the invasion that, as former British CPA Administrator in Maysan province, Rory Stewart, put it: ‘Most of the soldiers did not even know there had once been a civilian presence in the province. The new British battle group claimed that almost no development had happened before their arrival.’²⁴ All EIP efforts were effectively curtailed by early 2004 as the security situation in and around Basra significantly degenerated. However, the UK government continued to pledge money for such efforts, but in relatively small amounts given the cost of nation-building. Between 2003 and 2006 Whitehall earmarked £544million for post-war reconstruction in Iraq,²⁵ despite the absence of a coherent structural programme for the delivery of reconstruction and relief work for much of this period. It was not until 2006, three years after the invasion of Iraq, that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and DFID jointly established a formal agency to co-ordinate the delivery of British reconstruction plans, the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU), which in December 2007 changed its name to the Stabilisation Unit. This three year gap represented a crucial window of time during which the Iraqi people were most in need of coalition-provided security, economic provision and the maintenance of national infrastructure. In the absence of this, support for the militias in southern Iraq multiplied. This remains one of the most lamentable aspects of the British failings in Iraq. Indeed, by the admission of the British deputy head of the ORHA, Major-General Tim Cross, the British ‘didn’t have a coherent plan put together’ for post-war reconstruction. He went on to argue that there

²³ For a sense of the frustrations with access to reconstruction money see Stewart, *Occupational Hazards* (2007).

²⁴ Ibid, p.420.

²⁵ HCDC, ‘UK Operations in Iraq’, Thirteenth Report of Session 2005-06 (London: The Stationery Office, 10 August 2006), Ev.22.

was a pervasive trans-Atlantic belief that Iraq could ‘rebuild itself’ given its endogenous resources, negating the need for exogenous assistance.²⁶

The Stabilisation Unit was designed to help undertake and manage ‘capacity building assistance to the Iraqi Government in the South, focussing on Basra Province.’²⁷ With a budget of nearly £700million (a fraction of the finances required for an effective and substantial reconstruction effort in southern Iraq) there was an utter lack of civil-military co-operation in the reconstruction effort in MND(SE) given the absence of a coherent plan, and the failure to co-opt the British military into civilian reconstruction efforts, often resulting in parallel efforts being undertaken. Even the General Staff admitted in their official analysis of stability operations in Iraq that: ‘There was little effective correlation in the planning of reconstruction projects.’²⁸ Due to this confusion of responsibilities the military often had to fulfil political functions, for example some senior officers were posted as interim provincial governors in the absence of any action or input from the FCO or DFiD.²⁹ Indeed, this would be symptomatic of the demands placed upon the British military in Iraq: they would be multivariate, often contradictory, pushing them to the point of overstretch.

²⁶ Major-General Tim Cross interview on BBC *Newsnight* (March 2008)
http://news.bbc.co.uk/player/nol/newsid_7290000/newsid_7293300/7293390.stm?bw=bb&mp=wm&news=1&bbcws=1

²⁷ Stabilisation Unit fact sheet,
<http://www.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/resources/factsheets/Stabilisation%20Unit%20Iraq%20Factsheet.doc>

²⁸ ‘Stability Operations in Iraq’ (Army Code 71844), p.16, para.40.

²⁹ Warren Chin, ‘Why Did it All Go Wrong? Reassessing British Counterinsurgency in Iraq’, *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol.2 No.4 (2008), pp.125-6.

Junior Partner Counter-Insurgency: The British Military in Iraq

Since March 2003, the British Army had fought two very different conflicts. The initial war saw the execution of a conventional land invasion, pragmatically and successfully undertaken. Yet the degeneration of Iraqi society as lawlessness and insurgent violence proliferated required the British Army in southern Iraq to adapt to counter-insurgency warfighting as early indicators of Basrawi pliancy gradually gave way to anger and militia influence. On top of the tactical shift required between Phase III (combat) and Phase IV (post-combat) operations, the British military operations in Iraq also had been, by the British government's own admission, 'one of the first times in recent history that the UK had to take on the obligations of an occupying power, and operated as a junior partner in a counter-insurgency.'³⁰ This would present a unique strategic environment for the British military in counter-insurgency terms. Arguably, it was the first post-colonial counter-insurgency the British Army had faced.³¹ It was also essentially the first post-Maoist, indeed post-modern, insurgency the British had confronted in as much as the disparate groupings were not strategically cogent or territorially defined, eschewing traditional insurgent notions of a population-based 'centre of gravity', in addition to abandoning ideological dogma in favour of a blanket rejection of Western 'modernity.' Adaptability to this environment for the British Army would come at a heavy price and

³⁰ HCDC, 'Iraq: An Initial Assessment of Post Conflict Operations', Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2004-05 (London: The Stationery Office, 27 July 2005), p.1, para.1.

³¹ Northern Ireland was essentially a domestic conflict, and by the time the Iraqi insurgency ignited in 2003-04, the campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan had shifted prematurely from conventional warfighting, as witnessed during the October 2001 invasion, to peacekeeping as the Taliban disengaged coalition forces only to instigate a resurgent insurgency from 2006. Deployment to the Balkans during the 1990s arguably comes under the banner of peace support given the absence of significant kinetic engagement and the overarching nature of the humanitarian missions there.

would call into question the value of their accumulative post-World War Two counter-insurgency learning.

When troops from the British military contingent in Iraq, the 1st UK Armoured Division, began to take Basra city in early April 2003 they found themselves, by their own admission, fighting a twofold war. Concomitantly they were conducting a conventional campaign against regular Iraqi army units to gain access to the city as well as irregular *Fedayeen* and militias, requiring the parallel implementation of counter-insurgency tactics.³² Ground combat operations by British troops had taken nearly three weeks to secure Basra for the coalition, a strategically important site given its status as Iraq's second city and given southern Iraq's plentiful oil facilities. Charged with this strategic objective at the outset of the invasion, the 1st UK Armoured Division (an amalgam of armoured and mechanised brigades as well as rapid reaction forces), and its commanding officer, Major-General Robin Brims, believed Basra to be lightly defended and would therefore fall easily. The initial approach was to encircle the city and await an imminent dissipation of Iraqi forces as the collapse of Saddam's regime became apparent. This assumption was based in part on a reluctance to enter Basra immediately and thus avoid any traps that irregular troops and militias would have set, circumventing the possibility of an urban siege, mass civilian casualties and significant infrastructural damage.³³ This approach met with some criticism, particularly from their American allies, which questioned its level of aggressiveness in the face of enemy opposition.

³² Alice Hills, 'Basra and the Referent Points of Twofold War', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.14 No.3 (Autumn 2003), pp.23.

³³ Maj. Gen. Robin Brims, 'Operation Telic and the British Army Campaign of 2003: A Personal View', *Australian Army Journal*, Vol.3 No.1 (Summer 2005-06), p.100.

However, Major-General Brims defended his less belligerent securing of Basra by arguing that: 'I exercised restraint... But it was not because I was given "limited freedom of action", nor for "legal reasons", but because that is how we wanted to fight the war.'³⁴ That would be the last time that the British got to fight the war on their own terms.

The primacy of counter-insurgency in the British Army's tactical approach during and after the capture of Basra was complicated by the rise of multiple insurgencies, each with its own catalyst, methods, and endgame. The complete breakdown of the security situation that accompanied the British takeover of Basra created a suitable environment for the insurgencies to flourish. Looting, kidnapping and murder engulfed the city and proved beyond the capabilities of the British troops to adequately curb. Measures were taken by the UK military in Basra in mid-2003, including attempts to reconstitute the police force and repair the judicial system, however in the growing security vacuum Basra's vulnerable population felt an increasing lack of confidence in the British ability to protect their livelihoods and families. This allowed insurgent and militia groups to posit themselves as the true guarantors of security.³⁵

Even by August 2003, just three months after capturing Basra, the CPA chief Paul Bremer, was accusing the British military of going 'weak in the knees' by showing reluctance to take action against the increasing influence of the radical cleric Muqtada

³⁴ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, p.455.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch report, 'Basra: Crime and Insecurity under British Occupation' (June 2003), p.3.

al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army militia.³⁶ Bremer's criticisms belie wider American perceptions of the emergent insurgency, especially from Washington. Ali Allawi, the Iraqi finance minister in the Transitional National Government, credited the British for being first to appreciate the development of a nascent insurgency in the country, however 'the situation had not yet deteriorated to the point there they could challenge the entrenched American thinking' that post-invasion violence was orchestrated by Saddam loyalists.³⁷ An early signifier of the vicious pockets of resistance to the British presence came in June 2003 when six Royal Military Police (RMP) officers were killed by a mob in Majar al Kebir in Maysan province.³⁸ Yet such incidents were seen as isolated against the backdrop of British troops patrolling Basra in their regimental berets, shunning helmets and sunglasses, as in-roads were made into ingratiating the military with the southern Iraqi people.

Arguably this perception of a relatively 'secure' south lasted up until 2005, when the situation 'deteriorated significantly' due to a rise in attacks on British and Iraqi troops, and a rise in inter-Shia militia violence³⁹ – primarily between the rival factions of Muqtada al-Sadr's Madhi Army and the Badr Organisation, the paramilitary wing of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Republic of Iraq (SCIRI), the largest Shia political party in the south. Clearly the intensity of the insurgency in and around Basra was far short of that in Baghdad or the 'Sunni Triangle' in central Iraq, yet this corrosion in British

³⁶ Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, p.135.

³⁷ Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), p.241.

³⁸ For a vivid insight into the British military counter-insurgency approach in Maysan province see Richard Holmes, *Dusty Warriors: Modern Soldiers at War* (London: Harper Press, 2006).

³⁹ HCDC, 'UK Operations in Iraq', p.6, para.8.

control of the south was exposing British troops to greater threat and danger. As Brigadier-General Adel Abbas, one of Iraq's most senior soldiers and commander of the 1st Battalion of the Iraqi Army, lamented: 'In 2005 the British started to lose Basra. They left the mission and started to defend themselves.'⁴⁰ Insurgent control of Basra grew throughout 2005 and 2006 as rival factions vied for political and economic power, emboldened by increasing external support from Iran. One Basra resident summed up the 'miserable situation' in the city in spring 2006: 'Electricity is absent for most of the day and gasoline is very expensive. Ordinary people can never get a job at the state security forces because it is entirely controlled by the militias.'⁴¹ In the face of this evident breakdown in the British ability to implement sustainable reconstruction and ensure effective security, the Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki declared a state of emergency in Basra in May and promised to crush the insurgents and criminal gangs 'with an iron fist.'⁴² The visible manifestation of this 'iron fist' approach was 'Operation Sinbad', launched in late September 2006, a joint British-Iraqi mission to curtail the power of militia 'death squads' and shore-up the political power of Basra's civil leaders. Taking areas of the city systematically, around 1,000 British troops and 2,300 Iraqi soldiers cordoned-off and searched districts for militia members and provided security for reconstruction work to be carried out. 'Operation Sinbad' also involved placing Royal Military Police 'transition teams' with Iraq police units to build their resilience to insurgent infiltration. However, the military side of Sinbad, designed to last five months up until February 2007 'virtually came to a halt after one wave of raids' in the face of

⁴⁰ *The Times*, 'Six days on the sidelines left Britain facing wrath of allies', 5 August 2008.

⁴¹ *The Guardian*, 'British tactics reviewed as Basra erupts', 8 May 2006.

⁴² 'Iron fist' to tackle Basra woes', BBC News website (31 May 2006)
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/5032294.stm

militia opposition, ensuring that the operation was characterised as ‘a last attempt to be seen to be doing something’ before security responsibilities were transferred to the Iraqis.⁴³ Operation Sinbad is symptomatic of the overall British malaise in Iraq. Overstretched and operationally inert, the military were caught between the devil of vicious and multiple insurgencies and the deep blue sea of political mismanagement and financial constraint. The overall outcome was a strategically obfuscated military campaign that was to end in an indecorous withdrawal amidst the sweltering Gulf heat.

By the end of 2007 the power of the militia’s had still not diminished. Whatever peace there was in the city was, as the House of Commons Defence Select Committee concluded, ‘said to owe more to the dominance of militias and criminal gangs... than to the success of Multi-National and Iraqi Security Forces.’⁴⁴ Thomas Ricks described Basra in 2007 as having descended into ‘gangland warfare over control of oil exports and other sources of revenue.’⁴⁵ The permeation of government institutions in the city by rival extremist factions was exacerbated by politically-motivated assassinations, intimidation and vigilante law enforcement.⁴⁶ In large part this had been facilitated by the British military withdrawal to their Contingency Operating Base (COB) at Basra

⁴³ *The Independent on Sunday*, ‘Operation Sinbad: Mission failure casts doubt on entire British presence in Iraq’, 8 October 2006.

⁴⁴ HCDC, ‘UK Land Operations in Iraq, 2007’, First Report of Session 2007-08 (London: The Stationery Office, 3 December 2007), p.18, para.41.

⁴⁵ Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Allen Lane, 2009), p.242.

⁴⁶ *The Sunday Times*, ‘I felt a new terror on Basra’s streets’, 16 December 2007.

airport on the outskirts of the city, leaving all inner-city patrolling to their erstwhile Iraqi trainees, in early September.⁴⁷

The withdrawal to an ‘overwatch’ position was achieved peacefully despite the prevalence of violence and regularity of attacks against British troops. However, it soon emerged that this unmolested departure was the product of British military negotiations with the Mahdi Army, the primary perpetrator of insurgent violence against British troops. A Ministry of Defence spokesperson reluctantly justified the dialogue in pragmatic terms but denied a negotiated settlement as a pre-cursor to withdrawal: ‘We talk to the Mahdi Army and other military groups in our area of operations as part of the strategy of political engagement... (A)n outright refusal to engage in dialogue with them would not be in Iraq’s or Basra’s best interests.’⁴⁸ Similar arguments had of course been utilised to justify talks with the IRA in previous decades. However, a Mahdi Army leader claimed that the British had initiated talks with the militia group as their resilience had been broken: ‘They (the British) wanted us to stop attacking their compounds and troops... It was obvious they had suffered enough attacks and could not deal with more.’⁴⁹ The Mahdi Army claimed they had agreed a deal not to harass the British withdrawal on two conditions: that the withdrawal take all British troops out of the city and that detained Mahdi army members be released. The fulfilment of both of these provisos has understandably led to claims that the British ceded to insurgent demands,

⁴⁷ *The Times*, ‘Under cover of darkness, British troops pull out of their last base in Basra city’, 3 September 2007.

⁴⁸ *The Sunday Times*, ‘US tells generals to ‘lay off’ Britain as Mahdi Army claims it forced Basra truce’, 9 September 2007.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

even if the result was a reduction in violence against British troops. Although the Americans had started to cut deals with Sunni insurgents as the ‘Awakening Movement’ took hold in Anbar province, including cash incentives not to attack US forces, the consequences of the British deal with Shia militias were far greater – essentially surrendering control of a city to the insurgency. The Mahdi Army’s claims were seemingly vindicated in 2008 when it became apparent that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki had deliberately not included British commanders in the operational planning of ‘Operation Charge of the Knights’ – a massive joint US-Iraqi military operation to rid Basra of the influence of the militias, including the Mahdi Army, in April 2008 – because he was reportedly furious over the deal the British had done.⁵⁰ Iraqi government anger at the reluctance of the British military to arrest the power of the Mahdi Army in 2007-08 marked a distinct low-point not only in UK-Iraqi relations, but also in terms of the perceived efficacy of the British military counter-insurgency effort in the country.

This feeling was exacerbated by the relatively successful outcome of the US-Iraqi ‘Operation Charge of the Knights’ in dampening the potency of the Mahdi Army in Basra and securing a psychological and political victory for al-Maliki. Indeed, this operation encapsulated the frustrations that had been increasing within the American military command at the performance of their British allies. In mid-2007 US General Jack Keane, one of the architects of President Bush’s troop ‘surge’ strategy, outspokenly criticised the British military performance in Basra, stating he was ‘frustrated’ by the

⁵⁰ *The Times*, ‘Iraq snubs Britain and calls US into Basra battle’, 10 April 2008; *The Times*, ‘Secret deal kept Army out of battle for Basra’, 5 August 2008.

‘disengagement’ of British troops.⁵¹ When the British pulled back from Basra Palace to the airport in September 2007 a dejected senior US intelligence official interpreted this as the British being ‘defeated in the south.’⁵² Thomas Ricks concurs, arguing that this represented a remarkable turnaround for the British who in the early phase of the insurgency ‘had felt rather superior to the clumsy Americans’, but who had now ‘fell almost silent’ since the Petraeus-implemented ‘surge’ had radically reformed the situation in the American-occupied provinces.⁵³ On this transformation of fortunes, Hilary Synnott, the leading British political co-ordinator in Iraq during the early phases of the insurgency, had warned that ‘extol[ing] the merits of the British approach’ to countering insurgents in southern Iraq ‘implied that the British could manage such challenges better than the United States...’ Synnott also noted that praise for the British counter-insurgency effort in 2003-04, clad as it was in soft hats, *sans* sunglasses, was an irritant to American military commanders, who ‘proved remarkably sensitive on this point.’⁵⁴ Residual within these debates lay the weight of the British historical experience. The lessons from Northern Ireland in particular were interpreted by the Americans and British alike as having great utility for the British military in Iraq, able as they were to rely upon decades of familiarity with unconventional warfighting. Benign constructions of a discernable ‘British way’ of counter-insurgency certainly shaped expectations of not only what the British military would achieve in Iraq but also formed malignant perceptions of American military culture in the realm of asymmetric

⁵¹ ‘US “frustrated” with UK in Basra’, BBC News website, 22 August 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/6958395.stm

⁵² Ricks, *The Gamble*, p.177.

⁵³ Ibid, p.277.

⁵⁴ Synnott, ‘Statebuilding in Southern Iraq’, pp.40-1.

warfare.⁵⁵ Such intra-alliance division between the British and the Americans over counter-insurgency in Iraq arguably sourced its roots to the nature and balance of the coalition.⁵⁶ Junior coalition partner status had become a strategic norm for Britain in the post-Cold War world, as demonstrated in the first Gulf War and again in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Yet as discussed earlier, Iraq presented an unprecedented strategic scenario for the British military in as much as it represented the first time they had to operate as a junior partner in a counter-insurgency coalition. This placed the British in a strategic straightjacket through which any discernable ‘British approach’ to counter-insurgency was mitigated by overarching American coalition leadership. A strand of thought emerged within the British military that perceived significant barriers to the application of a distinctly ‘British way’ stemming from the American suzerainty over the whole of Iraq, thus restricting the independent ability of the British to forge separate civil-military solutions in MND(SE). As a consequence of this coalition structure, ‘British military policy became confused and suffered as it sought to serve the Americans.’⁵⁷ However, such an interpretation overlooks the health of British counter-insurgency doctrine in the early-twenty-first century. Iraq represented an insurgent campaign *sui generis* to the British historical experience. The very nature of the insurgency was radically different to anything the British had faced before and the conflict environment, coalition subjugation, and political restrictions all ensured that the challenges posed by

⁵⁵ In particular see Brig. Nigel Alywin-Foster, ‘Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency’, *Military Review* (November-December 2005), pp.2-15; and Andrew Garfield, ‘Succeeding in Phase IV: British Perspectives on the US Effort to Stabilize and Reconstruct Iraq’ (Foreign Policy Research Institute report, September 2006).

⁵⁶ Even the General Staff’s report of British stability operations in Iraq felt compelled to document US-UK friction over the utility of Britain’s previous counter-insurgency experience. See ‘Stability Operations in Iraq’ (Army Code 71844), p.8, para.19.

⁵⁷ Col. Alastair Campbell, ‘Assessing Britain’s Legacy: The UK Withdrawal from Iraq’, RUSI Commentary, <http://www.rusi.org/research/studies/menap/commentary/ref:C494B9295ACCE1/>

contemporary insurgents (often with global links, as seen in Iraq) would gravely undermine the decades-old faith in British competence at counter-insurgency.

Yet explanations of the seeming strategic failure of the British military in Iraq cannot rest solely upon interpretations of restricted operational freedom within the remit of the coalition's American-led strategic plan.⁵⁸ Two primary issues should arguably be at the forefront of our understanding: first is the overstretch of the British military, fostered by a overtly hurried troop 'drawdown', impinging upon the sustainability of the UK armed forces in Iraq; second, is the excessive political expectations as to what the military could achieve. The two factors are inexplicably linked.

The British military has faced severe tests of its own sustainability in Iraq from both the specific operational demands of security provision and reconstruction programmes, and from domestic public disillusionment at this most controversial of occupations.⁵⁹ This sustainability test has taken a human as well as institutional strain. In the first two and a half years following the invasion of Iraq, 1,333 British military personnel sought psychiatric treatment to help overcome the traumatic combat experiences necessitated by complex counter-insurgency operations.⁶⁰ Such statistics are not only indicative of the particular viciousness of the Iraqi insurgency but also of the overstretch faced by the

⁵⁸ For a Clausewitzian interpretation of the strategic void in which British troops were operating in Iraq see Thomas Waldman, 'British "Post-Conflict" Operations in Iraq: Into the Heart of Strategic Darkness', *Civil Wars*, Vol.9 No.1 (2007), pp.61-86.

⁵⁹ Amyas Godfrey, 'Sustainability of UK Forces in Iraq', *SITREP* (Royal Canadian Military Institute), Vol.65 No.6 (November/December 2005), p.7.

⁶⁰ *The Independent*, 'Iraq: 60 soldiers a month suffer mental illness', 15 June 2006.

armed forces engendered by a politically-motivated reduction in troop numbers. To undertake the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, the British deployed 41,000 troops. Just two months later, amid a confusing picture of lawlessness and political fluidity across southern Iraq, the government massively reduced UK troop numbers to 18,000. By the end of 2008, despite the quagmire of violence in Basra, troop numbers dropped to just over 4,000.⁶¹ Even at the peak of UK troop deployment at the point of invasion, the ratio of British soldiers to Basrawi civilians stood at 1:370, compared to the 1:65 troop-to-civilian ratio seen in Belfast at the peak of the Troubles in the early 1970s.⁶² Indeed, at the end of 2005 there were more British troops stationed in Northern Ireland than there were tackling insurgent violence in Iraq (around 8,000).⁶³ In the context of the American troop increase resultant of the 2007 ‘surge’, one British defence expert labelled the contrasting reduction of UK troops ‘a calamitous misjudgement... for which the government – anxious to reduce domestic criticism of its involvement in Iraq – was largely responsible.’⁶⁴ There were simply not enough ‘boots on the ground’ to achieve the ambitious strategic goals of ensuring security and reconstruction in the face of a virulent insurgency, rampant lawlessness and ill-coordinated political initiatives. Some observers, and indeed the then Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt in an interview with the *Daily Mail*, have argued that British troops should have been withdrawn far earlier than mid-2009 and that their continued presence exacerbated rather than placated violence in southern Iraq. However, as the American ‘surge’ clinically

⁶¹ Ministry of Defence, ‘Operations in Iraq: Facts and Figures’, <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FactSheets/OperationsFactsheets/OperationsInIraqFactsandFigures.htm>

⁶² Michael Knight and Ed Williams, ‘The Calm Before the Storm: The British Experience in Southern Iraq’, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Focus*, No.66 (February 2007), p.7.

⁶³ Godfrey, ‘Sustainability of UK Forces in Iraq’, p.8.

⁶⁴ Michael Smith, ‘Run out of town’: how we got it wrong’, *The Sunday Times*, 16 December 2007.

demonstrated, the maintenance of a sizeable military presence in Iraq would eventually ameliorate insurgent violence, augment a stable security situation, and hence create the conditions for a speedier (and crucially more credible) withdrawal. This may have been politically damaging, but would almost certainly have been militarily plausible. Yet in reality, by the end of ‘Operation Telic’ too few British troops were being asked to do too much, thus resulting in strategic inertia.

Such political short-sightedness in the context of Iraq created what the Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Jock Stirrup, labelled ‘false and inflated expectations’ of what the UK military could achieve.⁶⁵ The resultant lack of political post-invasion planning led to a strategic vacuum that left British forces, in the opinion of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee, ‘insufficiently prepared for the challenge represented by the insurgency.’⁶⁶ This was a situation from which the British military, with an insufficient number of troops and an absence of political will, could not regain the strategic initiative. As the British exit strategy neared completion, proponents of an optimistic interpretation of the British campaign in Iraq pointed to an effective transition to the Iraqi army, trained by 11 British Military Transition Teams (MiTTs) (although the training of the Iraqi Police Service by the UK Police Mission was arguably less successful given rife corruption and militia infiltration), and the establishment of an Iraqi Defence Academy and Staff College to ensure the lasting professionalisation of the Iraqi army. The Chief of Defence Staff dismissed ‘the nonsense about the British having

⁶⁵ *The Times*, ‘Government “gave public false hopes” on achieving Iraq goals’, 8 October 2007.

⁶⁶ HCDC, ‘Iraq: An Initial Assessment of Post-Conflict Operations’, p.21, para.36.

failed in Basra,⁶⁷ whilst even the newly installed head of the US Central Command, General David Petraeus, felt compelled to argue that: ‘the significance of the United Kingdom’s contribution should not be underestimated. Its military activities... have been instrumental in successful capacity building and the progress that we have made in various endeavours.’⁶⁸ However, this interpretation is perhaps overly benevolent. At best it can be inferred that British military achievements in Iraq did not match the expectations of 2003. Inroads into reducing insurgent violence in Basra came initially at the price of ceding control of the city to the Mahdi Army, and then were kinetically instigated without major British military input. It is therefore doubtful that the military mission in Iraq will mark a glorious first chapter in the history of British twenty-first century counter-insurgency campaigning.

Intelligence in Iraq

The bulk of literature on the role of intelligence in Iraq has naturally focussed on the WMD debacle and the failure of Anglo-American intelligence. Work scrutinising the intelligence dimension of the post-invasion counter-insurgency conflict has been significantly smaller.

⁶⁷ ‘Government “gave public false hopes” on achieving Iraq goals’, *The Times*, 8 October 2007.

⁶⁸ Ministry of Defence, ‘US Commander thanks UK for contribution to Iraq and Afghanistan’, 6 February 2009, <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/UsCommanderThanksUKForContributionToIraqAndAfghanistan.htm>

Debates about British intelligence in the build-up to the Iraq War centred around three main issues: the deliberate publication by the Blair government of Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) assessments; the pressure the government may have brought to bear on the JIC to reach its conclusions; and how the political pressures relating to the intelligence material contributed to the suicide of MoD weapons expert Dr David Kelly in July 2003.⁶⁹ Even after the invasion had been undertaken, political, media and public attention was diverted by allegations of ‘dodgy’ intelligence dossiers, with the JIC and MI6 thrown uncomfortably into the limelight as questions arose about the competency and neutrality of Britain’s intelligence agencies. Yet as this furore unfolded, British intelligence agents inside Iraq focussed their efforts in the immediate post-invasion period on locating supposed weapons of mass destruction as well as former Ba’athist leaders, especially ‘Chemical’ Ali Hassan al-Majid, former head of the Iraqi intelligence services, who was known to be in southern Iraq at the time of the invasion. Yet such efforts proved diversionary from the growing threat of the nascent insurgency. Military intelligence would therefore be crucial to the coming campaign.

Since the first Gulf War in the early 1990s, British intelligence had undertaken efforts to cultivate an intelligence network in Basra, given its proximity to Kuwait and traditional ties to Iran. As the British encircled Basra in March 2003, Special Air Service (SAS) and Special Boat Service (SBS) units infiltrated the city to make contact with these intelligence links, in order to build up a picture of Iraqi army strongholds and levels of

⁶⁹ Philip H. J. Davies, ‘A Critical Look at Britain’s Spy Machinery: Collection and Analysis on Iraq’, *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol.49 No.4 (2005), pp.41-2.

militia support.⁷⁰ It was this military intelligence that played a large role in allowing UK troops to eventually take control of the city virtually unhindered as a picture of the city's defensive weak spots had already been gleaned.⁷¹

The nerve centre of British intelligence in Iraq during Operation Telic was, however, not in Basra alongside the British military command, but was based in Baghdad, at Station House, inside the fortified 'Green Zone'. This intelligence headquarters was shared by MI6, SAS and Special Reconnaissance Regiment officers, and being housed under the same roof was certainly hoped to engender a great deal of inter-agency intelligence co-operation.⁷² Hopes for enhanced intelligence sharing with coalition allies, namely the Americans, were, however, frustrated by a series of bureaucratic barriers. Anglo-American intelligence-sharing became a critical problem at a very early stage in the counter-insurgency campaign. American intelligence protocol classified all intelligence data in Iraq as 'NOFORN' – no foreign access. This created the situation whereby British intelligence in Iraq, assembled by Station House, that was passed to the central US intelligence fusion centre for collation into an all-source intelligence picture was automatically marked 'NOFORN' barring the British from access to their own intelligence material. Tony Blair took this issue up directly with George W. Bush in 2004, who signed a directive allowing British (and Australian, but no other coalition countries) access to intelligence material for the planning and training phases of counter-

⁷⁰ Keegan, *The Iraq War*, pp.176-7.

⁷¹ Hills, 'Basra and the Referent Points of a Twofold War', p.31.

⁷² *The Sunday Times*, 'Secret war of the SAS', 16 September 2007.

insurgency operations, although Pentagon foot-dragging ensured this initiative was not efficiently enacted.⁷³

Despite these intra-coalition intelligence-sharing difficulties, the British aimed to garner as sizeable and accurate an intelligence picture of the insurgency as they could via their own capabilities. Yet these were extremely deficient in Iraq. The General Staff, in their report on UK stability operations, marks out the state of military intelligence-gathering in Iraq for particular criticism, especially in relation to the paucity of cultivated human intelligence (HUMINT): 'UK ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Reconnaissance) capability produced results often regarded as disappointing by battlegroups... usually related to the availability of HUMINT.'⁷⁴ Additional concerns were raised relating to the absence of a single intelligence database, the level of ingratiating with local communities who could have furnished intelligence, and the consistent inability of UK ISTAR systems to provide 'actionable intelligence', meaning as a result that British battlegroups were 'seldom able to mount operations on the basis on good intelligence.'⁷⁵ To compensate for such parlous ISTAR assets, the British had to rely on alternative channels for intelligence material, and this in large part shifted the emphasis onto the interrogation of detained suspected insurgents.

⁷³ Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2006), pp.318-9.

⁷⁴ 'Stability Operations in Iraq' (Army Code 71844), p.23, para.57.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.24, para 57 and p.54, para.6-3.

UK intelligence personnel undertook interviews with Iraqi detainees for five primary reasons: to gather a wider intelligence picture of Iraq; in order to glean intelligence for the Iraq Survey Group (ISG); to extract information for British purposes on supposed WMD; to interrogate those with information on Iraq military weapons systems; and to build up an intelligence picture of those forces resisting the coalition military presence.⁷⁶ As the occupation wore on and stockpiles of WMD proved illusory, it was the last of these intelligence objectives, ostensibly a counter-insurgency intelligence function, which came to dominate British intelligence capabilities. The House of Commons Intelligence and Security Committee revealed that between 2003 and 2005 ‘the SIS (MI6), UK Armed Forces intelligence personnel, military and civilian Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) personnel and, in a handful of cases, the Security Service (MI5)’ undertook interviews with detainees in Iraq.⁷⁷ Not only does the presence of MI5 agents indicate an intelligence awareness of possible British links to Iraqi violence, but the Intelligence and Security Committee report also reveals that unlike military intelligence personnel, the civilian agents of MI5, MI6 and the DIS were ‘not provided with any training concerning the Geneva Conventions... conversant with the rules for handling prisoners of war and detainees.’⁷⁸ Yet despite this concern over civilian intelligence agencies, the most high profile instances of detainee abuse have emanated from the actions of the Army. Widely publicised incidents, such as the death in British custody of Basra hotel clerk Baha Mousa in 2003 and the subsequent court-martialling of the first

⁷⁶ House of Commons Intelligence and Security Committee, ‘The Handling of Detainees by UK Intelligence Personnel in Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay and Iraq’, Cm 6469 (March 2005), p.21, para.80.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.21, para.79.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.21, para.81.

ever British soldier convicted of war crimes in relation to Mousa's death⁷⁹, severely threatened British efforts to ingratiate themselves with native Iraqis and undermined attempts to augment the perceived legitimacy of their occupation of southern Iraq.⁸⁰

With sinister echoes of Northern Ireland, the British government justified the existence of a de facto policy of internment for suspected insurgents in Iraq by arguing that it was 'necessary for maintaining security', claiming there existed 'an operational need for it.'⁸¹ Concerns over the existence of such a blanket policy were exacerbated by the structures in place to formalise it. In December 2003 the British established a Divisional Temporary Detention Facility (DTDF) at the Shaibah Logistics Base. At its peak, the DTDF held 140 prisoners in January 2004, and by mid-2006 the figure was 81. The average length of internment during this period was 198 days.⁸² Vague MoD guidelines for detention criteria created a situation whereby internees only had their cases reviewed monthly by the Divisional Internment Review Committee, made up solely of British military and intelligence personnel.⁸³ It was not until September 2006 that the British began including local Iraqi officers to sit on a joint Combined Review and Release Board to assess the cases of internees.⁸⁴ Given the entrenched tribal relations of southern Iraq it is surprising that the British opted to exclude all indigenous input into the

⁷⁹ *The Guardian*, 'First British soldier to be convicted of war crime is jailed for ill-treatment of Iraqi civilians', 1 May 2007.

⁸⁰ Rachel Kerr, 'A Force for Good? War, Crime and Legitimacy: The British Army in Iraq', *Defense and Security Analysis*, Vol.24 No.4 (2008), p.401.

⁸¹ HCDC, 'Iraq: An Initial Assessment of Post Conflict Operations. Government Response' (July 2005), p.5, para 12.

⁸² HCDC, 'UK Operations in Iraq' (August 2006), p.13, para.40.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p.13, para.41.

⁸⁴ HCDC, 'UK Operations in Iraq: Government Response to the Committee's Thirteen Report of Session 2005-06' (London: The Stationery Office, 19 October 2006), p.7, para.25.

detention process for so long given the axiomatic counter-insurgency need to keep local opinion, particularly that of local elites, onside and a part of the security process. By early 2008 all UK-held internees had been released⁸⁵, despite the spike in insurgent violence – symptomatic of the British military disengagement from Basra and the inability of the intelligence agencies to make significant headway into paralysing the insurgent capabilities. The myriad nature of the insurgencies facing the British in southern Iraq made for a complicated intelligence picture. Local, ground-level intelligence became essential as, for example, tip-offs picked up on patrol regarding arms caches or insurgent meeting points, became the most effective source of counter-insurgency information. Infiltration of insurgent groups, akin to the Northern Irish experience, was unable to occur, whilst efforts to co-opt ‘turned’ insurgents to act as agents was more problematic than in previous campaigns given the embedded tribal and religious affiliations of fighters, which were psychological obstacles difficult to surmount. Intelligence officers, along with their military counterparts, were to soon appreciate the nuanced nature of this particular form of insurgency.

Managing the *Jihad*: Insurgent Organisation in Iraq

Given the multitude of insurgent groups operating in Iraq since 2003 it remains deceptive to talk of a single insurgency. There were numerous groups pursuing numerous strategies by employing numerous tactics. As Steven Metz rightly

⁸⁵ HCDC, ‘UK Land Operations in Iraq 2007: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report of Session 2007-08’ (London: The Stationery Office, 21 February 2008), p.9, para.26.

characterised, the cornucopia of insurgent groups represented ‘a multi-headed snake, unable to decide on a single course of action but difficult to kill.’⁸⁶

Yet the insurgent groups facing the British in the south were of a very different construction to those fighting the Americans in central Iraq. United solely by their Shia Islamic faith, the two primary organisations vying for paramilitary power in the south were the Mahdi Army, loyal to the powerful cleric Mutada al-Sadr, and the Badr Organisation, armed wing of the Iranian-linked party SCIRI. The internecine struggle for Shia supremacy between these groups became a powerful sub-narrative to the insurgency across the south. The latter’s foreign ties added a further layer of complexity to the insurgency given the widespread assumption that the organisation of SCIRI and the Badr Organisation was directed from Iran, whose interest in southern Iraqi politics was cemented during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war. The Mahdi Army’s distinctly more Iraqi brand of Shia theology was channelled through Mutada al-Sadr’s extensive social and political network, derived from the legacies of his influential clerical father and grandfather. The Mahdi Army was therefore not solely defined by its insurgent organisation, potent though it was, but its remit also extended to providing the delivery of various social welfare schemes within Shia strongholds loyal to al-Sadr, notably the Sadr City district of Baghdad, which was the epicentre of an al-Sadr-inspired uprising in April 2004. This had the effect of ingratiating the Mahdi Army into wider sections of the Iraqi Shia population who were disillusioned by the coalition occupation. As a result, the CPA estimated that the Mahdi Army had swelled its ranks from just 200 in August 2003

⁸⁶ Metz, ‘Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq’, p.30.

to over 6,000 by March 2004.⁸⁷ Both the Mahdi Army and the Badr Organisation therefore were inherently politico-military in their outlook, arguably as a result of the ubiquity of their religiously inspired strategy and their varied, if blunt, tactic repertoire.

Prosecuting the Iraqi Insurgencies: Strategy and Tactics

Strategic violence on the part of the multitude of insurgent organisations in Iraq significantly hampered the strategic effectiveness of the coalition. The perpetuation of tactics such as suicide bombings, ambushes, and the planting of roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs), stalled coalition security and reconstruction initiatives and severely undermined coalition efforts to declare ‘victory’ in Iraq. Andrew Hubbard has observed that militia groups shaped the strategic terrain of the insurgency in three primary ways: ‘(1) their overt and covert hostility to the coalition and central government; (2) their infiltration of the Iraqi security forces; and (3) their suspicion of operating ‘death squads’ to carry out sectarian violence.’⁸⁸ Although insurgent violence in the British-controlled sections of MND(SE) was proportionally much smaller than in the American zones (it constituted just 4% of the total insurgent violence in the country in mid-2006⁸⁹) it was enough to fundamentally destabilise British control of the security and political situation in and around Basra.

⁸⁷ Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, p.302.

⁸⁸ Andrew Hubbard, ‘Plague and Paradox: Militias in Iraq’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.18 No.3 (2007), p.348.

⁸⁹ HCDC, ‘UK Operations in Iraq’ (October 2006), p.2, para.2.

Insurgent tactics in Iraq will indelibly be associated with the prevalence of the suicide bomb. Almost half of all attacks instigated by insurgents in Iraq between mid-2003 and mid-2006 were suicide bombings.⁹⁰ Indeed, more suicide attacks took place in Iraq between 2003 and 2006 than worldwide in the previous twenty years.⁹¹ As a contemporary incarnation of ‘propaganda of the deed’ that creates a horrifying spectacle of political violence, suicide bombings hold a morbid fascination virtually guaranteeing global media coverage. Such attacks, intrinsically linked as they are to an extremist religious interpretation of sacrifice, martyrdom and glory in the next life, turn this seemingly shocking and irrational tactic into a redemptory and salvationary act in pursuit of eternal remembrance. This lends suicide attacks a distinct strategic advantage, in so much as they transcend the traditional boundaries of the moral risk of warfare – death is actually to be welcomed not feared. The intrinsic appeal of martyrdom to the extremist branch of radical Islam grants suicide bombings a strategic longevity given the exalted place it now holds in the jihadist tactical stock. Yet suicide attacks appeal to insurgents for operational as well as religious reasons. They can be interpreted as ‘the ultimate smart bombs’ as suicide bombers are able to ‘choose the time and place of his attack with the utmost precision.’⁹² Furthermore, suicide attacks, usually undertaken by individual insurgents, pragmatically help preserve the wider insurgent movement, who would be more vulnerable to high casualty rates if they engaged coalition armed forces in urban warfare. But despite the proclivity of suicide attacks in Iraq it is clear that insurgent groups did not intend to exclusively or consistently utilise such a tactic to

⁹⁰ *The Independent*, ‘Made in Palestine: Iraq’s suicide bombers’, 6 June 2006.

⁹¹ George Michael and Joseph Scolnick, ‘The Strategic Limits of Suicide Terrorism in Iraq’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.17 No.2 (2006), p.122.

⁹² *Ibid*, p.115.

achieve their long term strategic goal of expelling coalition troops from the country. An overt reliance on suicide attacks rapidly exhausts the pool of the most dedicated and radical jihadists, therefore detrimentally effecting the potency of the insurgency in the long run. This shifted the tactical focus to the planting of remote IEDS, sniper attacks in urban areas, or, in the case of the British once they had retreated to Basra airport, mortar attacks. Such a varied tactical gamut had the effect of presenting an impression of a powerful and unrelenting insurgency and allowed the numerous groups to demonstrate their grip over the societies in whose name they claimed to act.

The Jihad Within: Internal Insurgent Support

The coalition endeavour to create a democratic Iraq, as enunciated through nationwide elections, gives us a crucial insight into how much support the numerous insurgent movements and their political branches were receiving. The elections were also a litmus test for the popularity of the military occupation and the newly imposed central political structures. Hilary Synnott, British CPA Regional Co-ordinator in the south of Iraq, recalls the popular mood towards the coalition as one of 'utmost suspicion'.⁹³ This opened the door for insurgent political groupings, particularly those with allegiance to Muqtada al-Sadr, to exploit the resentment towards the occupation. Al-Sadr played upon Shia disillusionment at the lack of functioning amenities, the lack of jobs, the lack of security, and stoked them by evoking Shia disenfranchisement in its historical context

⁹³ Synnott, 'Statebuilding in Southern Iraq', p.36.

in order to legitimise his claims to a rightful political standing, unshackled as he was from the repression of the Sunni-controlled Saddam era. The cleric's fiery rhetoric caught the popular Shia imagination, and in the 2005 national parliamentary elections Sadr's party won 30 of the 275 seats.⁹⁴ Al-Sadr's electoral popularity allows us to quantify insurgent support above that of the usual estimates of latent domestic support for insurgencies that have been customary in counter-insurgency research (the obvious exception in the British case being the electoral support for Sinn Fein as being indicative of backing for the IRA). Against such high internal support for some of the most influential and active insurgent groups in Iraq, the coalition would find their task of winning support for their strategy amongst the local population increasingly difficult in the face of religiously-inspired and violently-enacted efforts to secure their departure. This situation was given an added complexity by the unprecedented amount of external influence being brought to bear on the conflict.

The *Jihad* Without: External Insurgent Support

Intelligence estimates as to the external jihadist content in the multiple Iraqi insurgencies range from 4-10% of the combatants.⁹⁵ Yet despite this seemingly low figure these foreign fighters were amongst the most radical and were able to utilise their experiences in *jihads* abroad, most notably the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who led the

⁹⁴ Hubbard, 'Plague and Paradox', p.347.

⁹⁵ Michael and Scolnick, 'The Strategic Limits of Suicide Terrorism in Iraq', p.116.

notoriously brutal Al-Qaeda in Iraq before his death in an American bombing raid in 2006. The external support dynamic to violence in Iraq was therefore of great import.

Foreign fighters, by nature radicalised enough to travel across countries to engage in *jihad*, undertook a significant portion of suicide attacks in Iraq – their ultimate act of martyrdom against the coalition and its perceived cohorts. Many took Western foreign policy actions in the Middle East and the Israel/Palestine conflict as the catalyst to fuel their religious radicalism. By mid-2006 over 1,000 suicide bombers from across the Arab world had entered Iraq to undertake so-called ‘martyrdom operations.’⁹⁶ A senior Pentagon official in mid-2007 estimated that 80-90% of all foreign insurgents entering Iraq were doing so from Syria.⁹⁷ Although most entered from Syria, the nationalities of the majority of foreign insurgents differed to that of their entrance point. Captured Sunni insurgent documents found by the US Army in November 2007 revealed that 41% of foreign fighters who had entered Iraq since August 2006 were Saudi Arabian (totalling 307 insurgents). The second largest external insurgent contingent was Libyan, constituting 18% of the total (137 fighters).⁹⁸

However, the greatest external impingement on British counter-insurgency efforts in the south of Iraq came from Iran. By mid-2006 circumstantial evidence had engendered a widespread belief amongst British commanders in Basra that ‘specialist weaponry and

⁹⁶ *The Independent*, ‘Made in Palestine: Iraq’s suicide bombers’, 6 June 2006.

⁹⁷ *The Guardian*, ‘Iran’s secret plan for summer offensive to force US out of Iraq’, 22 May 2007.

⁹⁸ *The Guardian*, ‘Saudi’s make up 41% of foreign fighters in Iraq’ 23 November 2007.

IED technology was being smuggled into the region from Iran.’⁹⁹ As a consequence border security became an integral part of British security provision, crucial considering that the two British-controlled provinces of Basra and Maysan shared over 300 miles of border with Iran. In February 2007 the Bush administration published an intelligence report citing Iranian complicity ‘at the highest levels’ in supplying Shia militias across Iraq with IEDs, perpetuating Anglo-American diplomatic concerns at Iranian attempts to politically permeate Iraq and attain regional dominance.¹⁰⁰ By mid-2007 US diplomats in Iraq were so assured of Iranian influence over insurgent violence in southern Iraq that one official bluntly stated that: ‘Iran is fighting a proxy war in Iraq... They are already committing daily acts of violence against US and British forces... The attacks are directed by the Revolutionary Guard who are connected right to the top [of the Iranian government].’¹⁰¹ Even the then commander of US forces in Iraq, General David Petraeus, went out of his way to publicly accuse the Iranians of training, arming and advising a cell of the Mahdi Army who kidnapped five British civilians from the Iraqi Finance Ministry in May 2007.¹⁰² However, it is not just paramilitary weapons and training that the Iranian’s stand accused of providing in order to encourage Shia violence in southern Iraq, but other logistical means through which they can prosecute an insurgency. A Washington Institute for Near East Policy report concluded that Iranian support ‘often arrived in the form of commodities – money, hashish, and prescription medications – that could be used to recruit young, poor foot soldiers.’¹⁰³ However,

⁹⁹ HCDC, ‘UK Operations in Iraq’ (August 2006), p.8, para.17.

¹⁰⁰ *The Guardian*, ‘US accuses highest levels in Iran of supplying deadly weapons to Iraqi insurgents’, 12 February 2007.

¹⁰¹ *The Guardian*, ‘Iran’s secret plan for summer offensive to force US out of Iraq’, 22 May 2007.

¹⁰² *The Times*, ‘British hostages held by “Iran-backed” killers’, 21 June 2007.

¹⁰³ Knight and Williams, ‘The Calm Before the Storm’, p.28.

despite such a strong Iranian influence over the violence in southern Iraq, it would be wrong to assume it would be absent without such input. Many militias were able to become self-sustaining by engaging in activities such as oil smuggling and extorting kidnap ransoms to the tune of tens of millions of dollars a year.¹⁰⁴ Despite this level of financial independence that belies an overt reliance on outside support, the external input dynamic to the various insurgencies across Iraq was so active, symptomatic of the globalised nature of the Islamist *jihad*, as to significantly shape the potency and direction of the conflict to a level not encountered by the British since Egyptian involvement in Yemen in the 1960s.

‘It’s Been a Bumpy Path...’: Reflecting on Counter-Insurgency in Iraq

The campaign in Iraq has brutally demonstrated that in the post-colonial era, Britain lacks the political stomach and military edge to undertake prolonged counter-insurgency campaigns abroad. The challenge of the global Islamist *jihadi* insurgency and its feral franchise in Iraq since 2003 has questioned the efficacy of the British counter-insurgency ‘approach’ (a preferable term to ‘doctrine’ given the national tendency to avoid codifying counter-insurgency methods). The post-Maoist incarnation of insurgency has created a distinct challenge for the British military, whose experiences in Iraq, and indeed in Afghanistan too, will certainly trigger a period of strategic and tactical reflexivity regarding the utility of previous ‘lesson learning’, the worth of

¹⁰⁴ *The Independent*, ‘Report says Iraq insurgents are financially self-sufficient’, 25 November 2006.

maxims like ‘hearts and minds’ and ‘centre of gravity’, and the role of asymmetric conflict in future military training.

Politically, the conflict in Iraq may also mark a distinct line in the counter-insurgency sands. The campaign severely stretched civil-military relations as this highly politicised war in search of weapons of mass destruction transmuted into a vicious quagmire of suicide bombs, roadside IEDs and homemade mortars. The acute frustrations over the degeneration of the Iraq war led to redefinitions of ‘victory’ that would precipitate a withdrawal. On 18 December 2008 Prime Minister Gordon Brown outlined an exit strategy for British troops from a campaign that up to that point had cost £7billion and 178 British lives.¹⁰⁵ The phased withdrawal, agreed in conjunction with the Iraqi government, would see all but several hundred military advisors and trainers depart by the end of May 2009. The veracity of ‘victory’ claims, however, must be questioned. On the face of things, the removal of Saddam and the establishment of a democratic governance structure present a veneer of strategic success. However, the strength, effectiveness and possible longevity of these new institutions are not guaranteed, whilst the propensity for future ‘blowback’ to manifest itself could stem from measures such as co-opting former militias and insurgents into political and security functions. Furthermore, the question of Kurdish independence remains unanswered, whilst intra-Islamic violence threatens the long-term stability of this religiously and ethnically fractured country.

¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, ‘Britain in Iraq: it will be all over by May’, 18 December 2008.

The news of a long-awaited British withdrawal instigated a wave of claims from leading military figures as to the success of Operation Telic. As the full exit strategy got underway in March 2009, the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt, praised the UK counter-insurgency campaign: 'It's been a bumpy path but it's got us to the right place in a relatively short period of time... [W]e have got a very satisfactory outcome in southern Iraq and Basra today.'¹⁰⁶ Even the departing British commander in Basra, Major-General Andy Salmon, declared at the handover of authority for MND South to the Americans that: 'We've helped deliver security, we've set the conditions for social and economic development and I think we can leave with our heads held high.'¹⁰⁷ The security situation in and around Basra certainly disintegrated on the British watch in 2005 as insurgent anger, organisational abilities and weapons supplies increased as the British political and military commitment to a protracted counter-insurgency campaign decreased. On-the-ground civil-military reconstruction efforts were tirelessly undertaken within the remit of limit finances and confused lines of authority. However, the military and political sands were shifted irrevocably once the British sought a negotiated retreat to their Contingency Operating Base at Basra airport in September 2007, ceding the paramilitary and political initiative to the multiple insurgent and militia forces in the city, in particular Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army. The security situation was only recovered once the joint US-Iraqi 'Operation Charge of the Knights' reduced the potency of the insurgency in Basra in March 2008. This

¹⁰⁶ 'CGS – Nation should be proud of troops' work in Iraq', MoD website, 30 March 2009
<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/MilitaryOperations/CgsNationShouldBeProudOfTroopsWorkInIraq.htm>

¹⁰⁷ 'UK troops begin Iraqi withdrawal', BBC News website, 31 March 2009
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/uk/7973403.stm>

rescued to a certain extent interpretations of the British mission in southern Iraq from being seen as an abject failure, yet it did highlight the spurious nature of claims to complete counter-insurgency victory.

In short, the British campaign in southern Iraq represented the best and worst of British counter-insurgency. As the contemporary culmination of half a century's worth of 'modern' counter-insurgency learning, Iraq proved that to a large extent many aspects of this accumulative experience were now redundant. Reconstruction efforts and initial ingratiating attempts at 'soft' patrolling in the vein of a traditional 'hearts and minds' approach, were undone by indigenous recalcitrance, a complex network of sub-state violence, and political ineptitude. As the former British CPA Administrator Rory Stewart concluded:

'[I]t is true that the post-war planning was totally inadequate... We were indeed often comically isolated, whimsical and naive. And soldiers and civil servants were justified in their complaints about lack of strategy and lack of leadership... Nowhere in thirty years has there been such a concentration of foreign money, manpower and determination as in Iraq. Nowhere has their failure been more dramatic.'¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Stewart, *Occupational Hazards*, pp.426 & 431.

Politically-motivated counter-insurgency campaigns have been familiar to the UK experience since the Aden debacle and the instigation of a mass counter-insurgency effort in Northern Ireland, and to that extent Iraq continues this lineage. However, Iraq deviates from what has gone before in several crucial respects. The fundamental nature of insurgencies has changed, as territory and ideology have become transcended by contested theocratic and cultural invocations of religious and political control. Unlike in previous colonial counter-insurgencies, this requires the British political community to shape and espouse a coherent counter-narrative to pan-national insurgent rhetoric regarding Western foreign policy, cultural heritage, and political designs. As the international indignation at the invasion of Iraq attested, the impact of insurgencies is now no longer defined within geographical boundaries. The inter-connectedness of insurgent groupings and the transnational nature of the *jihadist* message collapses the importance of borders, nullifying the delineation between the safety of home and conflict afar. As such, there has consequently been a conflation of the international and the national in terms of the impact of political actions and military conflict. There is no longer the need for insurgent recruits to travel to conflict zones to witness firsthand acts of violence or perceived atrocities against their own people. Global media and virtual interaction ensured that what happened in Iraq had resonance throughout the Muslim diaspora. For example, the martyrdom tape of one of the 7 July 2005 London bombers, Shehzad Tanweer from Leeds, made direct reference to coalition military action in Fallujah. The days of national or even locally recruited insurgents, inspired by an ideology (as in Malaya), by a tribal uprising (as in Kenya) or territorially restricted nationalism (as in Yemen and Northern Ireland) are seemingly relegated to the history

books as the operational space in which contemporary counter-insurgency is conducted conflates the domestic and the foreign.

Telic, the operational codename for the British campaign in southern Iraq, is the Greek word meaning 'the end'. But the 'end' for the British campaign in Iraq is certainly not the one initially envisaged and has been re-written by the political authors of the war as the narratives of WMD and transferring Iraq from dictatorship to democracy became subverted by counter-insurgency. Despite British involvement in Iraq reaching its operational endgame in May 2009, insurgents in Basra will continue, in part, to shape the landscape of post-Saddam Iraq. The British may have left, but the insurgency has not been completely countered. And with the announcement in June 2009 of a formal inquiry into the British decision to go to war in Iraq reawakening the political decision-making and military actions in the country, the British departure from Iraq may only be the beginning of the Telic.

CHAPTER 8: *'Slow Learners, Slow Burners: Britain and Counter-Insurgency in the Past, Present and Future'*

The Value of the British Experience

Britain's experience in the post-World War Two era presented the military with numerous insurgent challenges whose *casus belli* ranged from communism (Malaya), to tribal supremacist land struggles (Kenya), to socialist-inspired nationalism (Yemen), and the nationalist fight for an alternative union (Northern Ireland). It is generally accepted that this volume of experience has equated to competence in counter-insurgency operations. However, the British response to the complexities of twenty-first century insurgencies, in its decentralised and globally networked form, has threatened to expose this competency as a colonial-era myth. Quantity of counter-insurgency combat experience has not equated into outright quality.

British thinking in the run up to the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq was arguably shaped by the formative experiences in Northern Ireland. It had moulded the military's low-intensity doctrine, had versed a generation of officers in the nuances of urban population pacification, and had demonstrated the difficulties of fostering a concomitant counter-insurgency and 'hearts and minds' campaign not only within the same city but often on the same housing estate. The ability during Operation Banner to seek and maintain an 'acceptable level of violence' combined with its

often hyperbolised colonial successes ensured that British thinking on the issue of countering insurgencies earned respect within foreign militaries and was exported as a rare example of how a state army can subdue a sub-state enemy without compromising strategic goals.

However, this body of experience has not translated into a cogent counter-insurgency lesson-learning process within the British military. The very need to ‘re-learn’ counter-insurgency in the post-9/11 conflict environment has undermined assertions as to the British military’s existence as an effective ‘learning institution’.¹ This doctrinal amnesia has created an imperative for the armed forces to hone its lesson-learning abilities whilst simultaneously adapting to the intricate challenges of sub-state and transnational post-Maoist insurgent violence in the third millennium.

Yet this process cannot begin unless, as the case studies and the Tri-partite Model have demonstrated, certain axiomatic elements are exposed. Firstly, when it comes to counter-insurgency, the British are slow learners. The early phases of nearly every campaign in the ‘classical’ era were marred by stagnancy, mismanagement and confusion. It was two years into the Malayan Emergency before the military conceived of a cohesive civil-military strategy in the form of the Briggs Plan. The crucial early years of the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland were marked by displays of

¹ A title conferred upon it during the Malaya campaign by John Nagl in his book *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2005).

indiscriminate force and an inability to domesticate the response.² As Lt-General Sir John Kiszely rightly observes, the Malayan Emergency is ‘a much lauded counter-insurgency campaign, but often overlooked is the fact that in the early years... the British Army achieved very little success.’ The Director of the UK Defence Academy then goes on to concede that in relation to Northern Ireland, ‘it is easy in the light of the later success... to forget the early mistakes and the time it took to rectify them.’³ In counter-insurgency terms, therefore, the British have been consistently slow to instigate an effective strategy and achieve operational success.

Indeed, this trend reveals another painful element of British counter-insurgency conduct, namely the short-circuiting of context. The preponderance for template solutions, arguably stemming from the Malaya blue-print (or ‘Templer solutions’ as they should perhaps be known), has contributed to a process of discriminate selectivity when it comes to imbibing doctrine and disseminating a lesson-learning programme. What is clear is that the mercurial and complex nature of transnational *jihadi* insurgency does not lend itself to any preconceived templates to countenance the threat that may have been more appropriate when faced with a more strategically cohesive and physically definable enemy. The contextualisation of the conflict’s origins and the insurgent’s motivations are essential if the non-kinetic counter-narratives and the kinetic counter-insurgency operations are to be effective and nuanced.

² Rod Thornton, ‘Getting it Wrong: The Crucial Mistakes Made in the Early Stages of the British Army’s Deployment to Northern Ireland (August 1969 to March 1972), *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.30 No.1 (2007), pp.73-107.

³ Lt-Gen. Sir John Kiszely, ‘Learning About Counterinsurgency’, *Military Review* (March-April 2007), pp.6-7.

As Theo Farrell has observed, the process of British military transformation to meet the push towards network-centric warfare and the demands of contemporary strategic needs is shaped by resource constraints, domestic politics and military culture.⁴ None of these three elements are conducive to quick adaptation in the British case. The military culture of the British Army is essential to the process of counter-insurgency ‘lesson-learning’ given the inherent aversion to formalised doctrine. Pragmatic flexibility on a campaign by campaign basis has been evident given the absence of codified strategic manuals. Counter-insurgency lesson-learning for the British has therefore become a creative and not an imitative process. The transferral of lessons, particularly during the late colonial era, occurred in large part due to the deployment of personnel who brought with them pre-conceived notions of best operational practice honed from previous counter-insurgency experience in other theatres. This emphasis on the transfer of counter-insurgency lessons emanating from personal experience and conveyance of individual thought amongst senior officers (for example, Frank Kitson from Kenya to Northern Ireland) is strengthened by the relative absence of doctrinal enshrinement.⁵

Yet in the technologically-fixated, nuclear war-gaming mindset that dominated Cold War military thinking, counter-insurgency was not deemed an appropriate or indeed relevant form of warfare that required significant thought or adequate training. Despite a plethora of combat experience in low-intensity scenarios, counter-insurgency came bottom of the British strategic pile. Yet this only partially explains

⁴ Theo Farrell, ‘The Dynamics of British Military Transformation’, *International Affairs*, Vol.84 No.4 (2008), p.783.

⁵ Hew Strachan, ‘British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq’, *RUSI Journal*, Vol.152 No.6 (2007), p.10.

the relative unease with which the British military has adapted to counter-insurgency in the 'Long' War on Terror. It can arguably be perceived that a fear exists in Western military circles that the current emphasis on counter-insurgency is a temporary fad and that an undue focus of attention on low intensity and peace support operations undermines the ability to conduct potential future conventional wars. Despite these concerns there is a discernable need to adapt in the face of this seeming duopoly. Preparing for counter-insurgency operations can still be achieved with a degree of flexibility that does not ignore high intensity, regular warfare training. What it does engender, however, is an altered emphasis on personnel priorities, as the very nature of counter-insurgency requires a greater number of intelligence officers, medical officers (for use within the host nation population as well), and information officers (in an effort to shore up a cogent counter-narrative to the insurgent's message).

Another barrier to counter-insurgency education within the British military is the basic, indeed inescapable, reality that counter-insurgency is inherently difficult to learn. It is a unique form of warfare, posing its own complex strategic problems and requiring challenging tactical adaptation. This is a hurdle not unique to the British army. The Americans learnt this the hard way, as did the French, the Dutch, the Russians, and the Portuguese. Subsequently, a reliance on doctrine and training manoeuvres are rendered largely irrelevant. It does, however, require a much higher degree of education within the military as to the distinctive threat posed by this inimitable form of conflict and a heightened level of both historical consciousness pertaining to past strategic and tactical successes and failures, as well as increasing the understanding of the contemporary insurgent threat. The military cannot learn

counter-insurgency without first understanding the nature of insurgency itself. Yet this is a time-consuming process and requires as much, if not more, emphasis on non-kinetic elements such as cultural learning, as it does on the kinetic training itself. This demands of military commanders a different set of characteristics and leadership skills than regular warfare, fostering the imperatives of cultural sensitivity and emotional intelligence as key tools in the contemporary counter-insurgency toolbox.

One more significant plank of the debate regarding British conduct of counter-insurgency surrounds the continuing relevance and utility of the essentially anti-Maoist counter-insurgency doctrine to emerge from the ‘classical’ period in the 1960s. The Malaya and Vietnam-inspired thoughts of Robert Thompson in particular have influenced the thinking of the British Army and arguably can be seen as a departure point for British actions in Operation Telic.⁶ However, questions surround the applicability of half century-old maxims that were designed for a fundamentally different enemy on a fundamentally different battlefield in a fundamentally different political context.⁷ Modern globalised insurgency clearly represents a different challenge to that posed by previously territorially-defined Maoist insurgencies.⁸ However, it would be remiss to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Certain discernable trends do need to become enveloped into new thinking, yet this does not render sixty years worth of counter-insurgency strategic thought obsolete. Learning

⁶ Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (St Petersburg, FL: Hailer Publishing, 2005 [1966]).

⁷ For fear of the application of an ‘outdated and even obsolete doctrine not appropriate to the current situation’ see Warren Chin, ‘Examining the Application of British Counterinsurgency Doctrine by the American Army in Iraq’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.18 No.1 (March 2007), p.14.

⁸ For analysis of the nuanced dimensions of contemporary global insurgency see David Kilcullen, ‘Countering Global Insurgency’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.28 No.4 (August 2005), pp.597-617; John Mackinlay, ‘Globalisation and Insurgency’, *Adelphi Papers*, No.352 (2002).

from past campaigns is still a task of high importance and utility.⁹ There still remains a need to formulate a clear political strategy within the parameters of legality, and that addresses the subversive message of the ‘enemy’ in the post-modern age. There are indeed some counter-insurgency truths that need to be held as self-evident. Half-century old contributions to counter-insurgency are not the sum total of what British thinking on the issue can be. As Bruce Hoffman has argued, the British approach during the ‘classical’ era of counter-insurgency ‘is not without relevance to America’s current involvement in Iraq.’¹⁰ As globalisation impacts upon the very conduct and presentation of counter-insurgency campaigns via the global media and an increasing sense of technologically-inspired human interconnectedness, it remains as crucial as ever that a political strategic narrative is cogently formulated.¹¹

Militarily speaking, single state counter-insurgency operations are no longer relevant. Coalition-based campaigns are likely to be the norm for the foreseeable future given the spatial and temporal freedom granted to an open-ended *jihad* and the shared conglomeration of threat to the ‘near’ and ‘far’ enemies. For these ‘enemies’ the real challenge to effective coalition functioning is therefore political intractability. There is a clear imperative to adopt appropriate government structures; domestically (through inter-agency co-operation), within the coalition itself, and with the host nation where operations are being conducted (via simultaneous programmes of strengthening governance structures and economic and humanitarian assistance).

Learning lessons from previous conflicts does not necessarily equate to re-fighting

⁹ Gary Sheffield, ‘Military Past, Military Present, Military Future: The Usefulness of Military History’, *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 153 No.3 (2008), p.102.

¹⁰ Bruce Hoffman, ‘Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq’, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol.29 No.2 (2006), p.107.

¹¹ For an excellent contextualisation of the contemporary conflict environment see Adam Roberts, ‘The “War on Terror” in Historical Perspective’, *Survival*, Vol.47 No.2 (Summer 2005), pp.101-30.

the last war, but ensures a greater efficiency, a greater flexibility and, ultimately, a greater capacity to fulfil counter-insurgency objectives. Revisiting past conflicts, as Robert Tomes argues, ‘provides perspective as well as context’ for current events.¹² Indeed, as John Lewis Gaddis stated at the end of the Cold War: ‘studying the past has a way of introducing humility... because it suggests continuity of the problems we confront, and the unoriginality of most of our solutions for them.’¹³ The debate over the American adoption of a new counter-insurgency field manual, the much-heralded *FM3-24*, is a testament to the consideration of ‘unoriginal’ solutions.¹⁴

The ‘Tri-Partite Model’: A New Paradigm for Understanding Counter-Insurgency

The Tri-partite Model represents an effort to extrapolate multiple conflict variables across numerous case studies. It is intended to serve as an important lens for perceiving the full gamut of dynamics evident across any number of counter-insurgency campaigns, providing a framework of understanding as to the ultimate level of strategic attainment for the counter-insurgent. In short, the insurgent/counter-insurgent/international political context interface allows us to weight the importance of the variables ensconced in the model upon the conclusion of any given campaign.

¹² Robert Tomes, ‘Relearning Counterinsurgency Warfare’, *Parameters* (Spring 2004), p.16.

¹³ John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.3.

¹⁴ *US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); ‘Review Symposium: The New US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual as Political Science and Political Praxis’, *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol.6 No.2 (June 2008), pp.347-60; Frank Hoffman, ‘Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency?’, *Parameters*, Vol.37 No.2 (Summer 2007), pp.71-87; James S. Corum, ‘Rethinking US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.28 No.1 (April 2007), pp.127-42; Alexander Alderson, ‘Learning, Adapting, Applying: US Counter-Insurgency Doctrine and Practice’, *RUSI Journal*, Vol.152 No.6 (December 2007), pp.12-19; David Ucko, ‘Innovation or Inertia: The US Military and the Learning of Counterinsurgency’, *Orbis*, Vol. 52 No.2 (Spring 2008), pp.290-310.

From this it is possible to judge that despite the highly politicised nature of counter-insurgency warfare the efficacy of the military aspect of the counter-insurgent dimension remains paramount to operational and strategic success. If the military cannot succeed in reducing insurgent violence then no manner of political measures will arrest the spiralling security situation. In relation to the insurgent dimension of the model, the level of external support insurgent groups received has proved itself to be a critical enabler of insurgent success. An absence of exogenous funding and weaponry has stunted insurgencies and fatally undermined their potency. Arguably, as the application of the model to these case studies reveals, external insurgent support is more important to the effectiveness of an insurgent group than the level of internal support it receives amongst its own population. An armed group without weapons is irrelevant, yet an armed group with minimal popular support is still an armed group. The security threat remains.

When analysing the case studies holistically through the paradigm of the Tri-Partite Model in order to garner a meta-historical view of the evolution of British counter-insurgency war-fighting in the post-World War Two era, a picture emerges of slow British learning, the implementation of a slow burning military strategy, and a succession of deficient insurgent opponents who have compensated for the inadequacies of the British approach. Reflecting on the past insurgent opponents facing the British, it can be concluded that despite engendering a perception of an effective counter-insurgency approach, the British have actually come up against a set of insurgent groups organisationally weak, strategically incompetent, or lacking in internal and external support. This perhaps explains why the abject failure of British counter-insurgency in Iraq must be contextualised in relation to the insurgent

enemy, who were well organised, strategically driven, tactically brutal and well-supported from within and outside Iraq. On this issue, Thomas Mockaitis has taken a rather rosy view of British success in counter-insurgency in the post-war period. By equating experience with effectiveness, Mockaitis perhaps too benevolently observes that during the ‘classical’ counter-insurgency period of the mid-twentieth century ‘the British approach had yielded more success than that of any other nation faced with internal conflict... Nothing like an Algeria or Vietnam tarnishes the British record.’¹⁵ The absence of a catastrophic counter-insurgency failure, however, should not detract from the drawn-out strategic inertia that came to characterise consecutive campaigns, and is perhaps an outcome more indicative of the preparedness and efficiency of the insurgent opponents that the British have faced – the MRLA, Mau Mau and even the IRA were certainly not as tactically savvy or strategically trenchant as the National Liberation Front (NLF) in Algeria or the VietCong.

Bearing in mind such other cross-national examples, it must be pressed that the Tri-Partite Counter-Insurgency Model is not exclusive for application to the British experience. The inherent nature of overarching civil-military concerns, levels of insurgent support and international political pressures to counter-insurgency warfare as a whole bestows upon the model an element of transferability to other national cases, such as the French or American experiences, and could provide the comparative study of multi-nation asymmetric war-fighting with an insightful and holistic framework of understanding.

¹⁵ Thomas R. Mockaitis, ‘The Phoenix of Counterinsurgency’, *Journal of Conflict Studies*, Vol.27 No.1 (2007), pp.8 & 11.

So what does the application of the Tri-Partite Model to the case studies in this thesis tell us about the British counter-insurgency experience? Firstly, it highlights the way in which omnipresent political determinants continue to play a large role in shaping the context of both the insurgency and the counter-insurgency strategy. The politicised nature of insurgency (and the efforts to counter them) is inescapable and presages the strategic endgame of participants – although, it should be noted, not to the extent that the efficacy of the kinetic effort becomes eclipsed. French ‘warrior-scholar’ David Galula asserted back in 1964 that counter-insurgency was ‘20 per cent military action and 80 per cent political.’¹⁶ However, as the Tri-Partite Model presages, it is often within that 20 per cent of military action that counter-insurgency campaigns are won or lost. Reconstruction work, ‘hearts and minds’ efforts, and political restructuring can only take place effectively once the military situation is under control.

There are certain trends that have been politically perennial in the post-war period when the British have been undertaking counter-insurgency operations. First is the secret yet persistent engagement in backchannel talks as a pre-cursor to attempted peace deals. Dialogue with insurgent groups happened in the Malayan jungle, the Kenyan forest, and the London homes of ministers. The deal struck with the Mahdi Army in Basra to secure an unhindered withdrawal from the city to the Contingency Operating Base (COB) at Basra airport has now become symbolic of the British impotence in Iraq. Previous efforts had always come from a relative position of strength. The second noticeable trend in the British political management of counter-

¹⁶ David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006 [1964]), p.63.

insurgency campaigns from Malaya through to Iraq is the politically stage-managed withdrawals that have conditioned the military departure, presaged on training indigenous security forces and ensuring an acceptable post-occupation political regime is in place. The shift towards the domestication of political and military control was long established as an integral element of military 'draw down' long before 'Ulsterisation' came to dominate discourse on local security responsibilities, whilst the scuttling from Aden in 1967 prior to ensuring a feasible political structure was secured has haunting echoes with the British withdrawal from another Middle Eastern counter-insurgency campaign over forty years later.

The military aspect of the Tri-Partite Model has shown us that after the withdrawal from Iraq, British counter-insurgency conduct stands at a crossroads. The underwhelming performance in and around Basra coincided with the Americans attaining a distinct level of counter-insurgency strategic vision and tactical ability. *FM3-24*; the rise to prominence and influence of the counter-insurgency *wunderkind* General David Petraeus; the inculcation of counter-insurgency learning at all levels of the American military; and the ubiquity of counter-insurgency in the US across the academic-military divide have all contributed to a distinct shifting of the sands in irregular warfare terms. The Americans no longer need to (misguidedly) hold up Malaya or Northern Ireland as exemplars of counter-insurgency conduct. They can now look at Anbar province and the 'surge' to become the new case studies in counter-insurgency textbooks. The Americans have learnt the hard way in Iraq, and like the British before them, it has been a slow and painful process. However, the combination of British ineptitude in Basra and eventual American cogence in central and western Iraq has snuffed out residual opinion relating to British competence at

counter-insurgency. The volume of criticism directed at the British over Iraq has swept away long-standing perceptions that counter-insurgency is the British Army's default mode. Indeed, the British performance in Helmand province in Afghanistan since the resurgence of the Taliban by 2006-07, has done much to reinforce perceptions of a struggling and stretched military, searching for a level of strategic clarity and operational potency.¹⁷ Afghanistan now continues as the primary testing ground of new-found American confidence in the realm of counter-insurgency and Helmand province remains the crucible in which the British military can salvage their reputation. Yet eight years into Operation Herrick, the signs are again of a slow lesson-learning process (especially pertaining to the lessons emanating from Iraq regarding sufficient military resources and reconstruction efforts) and certainly a slow-burning strategy given the protracted inability to reduce the strength of the Taliban or sufficiently reduce their latent avenues of support and finance (namely the Afghan poppy harvest and heroin trade).

As British combat troops have now withdrawn from Iraq, can we now point to an effective lesson-learning process within the British armed forces when it comes to counter-insurgency? At base, the struggle to contain the violence in southern Iraq, especially Basra, points to an increasingly inescapable conclusion that the British are not as good at counter-insurgency as was previously assumed. Political posturing has resulted in a reluctance to admit to failings, which only serves to stifle an effective lesson-learning process. Political intractability on the domestic front runs the risk of ensuring that tensions between commanders in theatre and Whitehall directly impacts

¹⁷ For a critical overview see Warren Chin, 'British Counter-Insurgency in Afghanistan', *Defense and Security Analysis*, Vol.23 No.2 (2007), pp.201-25.

upon the conduct and effectiveness of the campaign. There are thus severe strains on UK civil-military relations in the realm of counter-insurgency. With systems of a single civil-military commander now increasingly anachronistic (indeed, they were the exception and not the rule in the British experience), there has to be clear lines of communication and access between commanders on the ground and the highest echelons of executive government both back home and within the host nation. This will undoubtedly help foster the imperative of maintaining a clear political aim for military operations, thus ensuring that means do not come to overshadow ends. This is a concept that holds increased importance in the era of globalised post-Maoist insurgency.

Another striking feature about the British experience that the Tri-Partite Counter-Insurgency Model allows us to see is that each campaign begins with a familiar tale in relation to intelligence capabilities. From Malaya to Iraq, British intelligence has failed to foresee and has been woefully unprepared for the outbreak of an insurgency. Aside from agency deficiency, this oft-repeated scenario of intelligence agencies being taken unawares by the instigation of insurgent violence raises a wider question regarding the ability to forecast the political and paramilitary intentions of asymmetric non-state actors as opposed to symmetric state enemies. There are obvious difficulties in cultivating human intelligence (HUMINT) on insurgent groups often drawn from narrow and closed segments of a society. For this reason alone, insurgencies are difficult to see coming. Yet British intelligence capabilities, centrally and on-the-ground, did not (and arguably still do not) retain the capacity to estimate the emergence of sub-state insurgent threats. From these consistently inadequate origins, however, emerges a picture of British intelligence adapting to the

threat and positing itself as an indispensable counter-insurgent tool. The role played by the intelligence agencies, and their military intelligence counter-parts, has been integral to operational successes in every campaign.

By highlighting the need to merge analysis of insurgent and counter-insurgent strategic and tactical factors within the context of the international political situation, the Tri-Partite Model presents a new synthesis of how we can interpret the evolution of the British approach to counter-insurgency over the past sixty years. The asymmetric nature of counter-insurgencies ensures that the role of the state (Britain) has been explored in relation to non-state actors (insurgents) within the wider international order, thus cutting across and between the multiple levels of global security. This applied analysis enables us to appreciate what lessons the colonial era counter-insurgencies can teach us about British conduct in Iraq and evaluate whether the British military, intelligence and political communities have been effective 'learning institutions'. The conclusion the analysis reaches, via the consistent application of the same variables across case studies, is that there are serious deficiencies in British 'lesson learning' in the realm of counter-insurgency. It was, and remains, slow and parenthetical. For this reason, we can see that the historical case studies highlight much continuity in the British approach to tackling insurgencies from Malaya onwards, notably detention without trial of suspects, an emphasis (not always successful) on close civil-military relations, and attempted tactical flexibility. Even the introduction of compulsory ID cards for the purposes of countering the terrorist threat in Malaya in 1948 holds a prescient example for contemporary debate on the very same issue within the UK. In short, a projected historical analysis, under the guidance of an effective framework, reveals a steady permanence in security

study controversies: detention without trial, shoot-to-kill policies, torture of detainees for intelligence-gathering purposes, the application of ‘hearts and minds’ tactics, alleged abuse by troops, and crucially, the inability of the British Army to quickly adapt to an asymmetric conflict environment. The Tri-partite Model enables this trajectory to be examined within the confines of a workable and effective model of analysis, lending the study of counter-insurgency a valuable and useful resource.

Counter-insurgency is now far more complex given the operational environment, the non-imperial governance structures and psyches, and the rise of global instant media coverage. Previous adherence to the epithet of ‘hearts and minds’ and ‘minimum force’ have now transformed into a myriad of strategic axioms that are often undertaken simultaneously: peace support, stability and reconstruction, and humanitarian relief. Living as we do in the era of ‘Fourth Generation Warfare’ (4GW), counter-insurgency is arguably the medium-term future of war-fighting. There is thus a pressing need for a greater understanding of insurgencies, in their past, present and potential future modes in order to contextualise the debates surrounding the efforts to counter them. The body of experience accumulated by the British in the past sixty years therefore represents a rich empirical base from which to observe, via the insights of applying the Tri-Partite Counter-Insurgency Model, the axiomatic nature of military effectiveness and the significance of external support upon insurgent potency. Yet slow British military lesson-learning, as seen throughout these case studies, provides strategists of the future the opportunity to understand the value of lesson transferral and the problems of slow-burning strategic inertia. The popular perception of British counter-insurgency efficacy from Malaya onwards has certainly been unsupported by a perpetual picture of consistent tactical errors in the

early phases of campaigns and long-term strategic obfuscation. After the abject performance in Iraq, the British military, and especially their political masters, have a long way to go to rebuild the mythology of British competence at counter-insurgency warfare. But perhaps they were never as good as everyone thought in the first place.

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